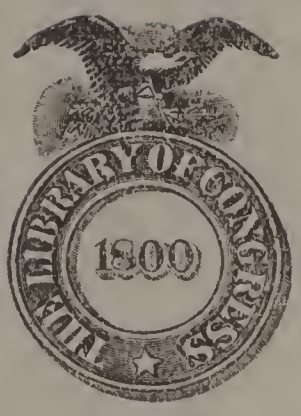
The Way of the Walking Wounded

B. F. Borchardt



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THE WAY OF THE WALKING WOUNDED

B. F. BORCHARDT

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BY

B. F. BORCHARDT

Haud ignara mali, miseris succurere disco.
—Vergil.

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TO MY FRIEND

E. J. PFLEIDER

THE WAY OF THE WALKING WOUNDED

The Way of The Walking Wounded

I

The old bark *Rachel* was straining and pitching before a fresh breeze. The Sand Key light, the southernmost outpost of Florida and of the United States, had gleamed for the merest instant over the white crests of the sweeping phalanxes. It had not, however, escaped the careful eye of the mate, who now came forward to take a bearing as soon as it should appear again.

Against the forward gunwale, silhouetted in the greenish shimmer of a running light that probed the darkness like the uncanny spotlight of another world searching for its own, leaned the figure of a second man whose eyes were also on the alert to catch that uncertain glimmer. For a brief second it gleamed as the boat rode high. The mate made his calculations and started aft.

"Well, lad," the mate addressed the figure, as he, too, came into the baneful reflection of the starboard lantern, "yonder's Yankeeland."

Jules Cardot turned and shot a grateful look at him. After a self-imposed exile of three years in South America, his heart was so full of the mingled sorrow of the prodigal and genuine patriotic joy, that together these emotions brought him to the brink of tears and he could not trust himself to answer.

The light was becoming larger and brighter, clear and fixed; occasional higher flashes streaked the black rollers in miniature far below it. By nature a star-gazer, Cardot welcomed it as an honored guest among his friends in the nocturnal firmament, for the tropic stars had become intensely personal to him on the long voyage home. Vega was a virgin robed in purest white; Arcturus, a satrap gleaming with jewels of many facets. There was ruddy Altair, with the mystic arrow in perpetual flight near by, and in the west, writ large upon the face of the sky, the eternal question mark of Scorpio, with its premier star, the blazing Antares, glaring at the approach of its rival, Mars.

These and many others with whom he had become acquainted, held nightly conferences over him and his destinies; to them he bared his past and they gleamed or withheld their approval. Now they were wheeling and twinkling jocundly above him, for there was peace in his heart. They seemed to bear a message; it was as though they had put their heads together and, nodding with extravagant, silent mirth, signalled: "The young man doth take himself too seriously. Forget the past—that dead tyrant that rules the world from the debris of time—and address thyself joyously to the future."

He smiled at this conceit and felt the invigorating glow of optimism. The future was as blank as a new tablet of writing paper. He solemnly promised both himself and his heavenly councillors that he would not re-write the errors of the past, nor smudge the book with attempted erasures. After three years of knocking around on his own, he felt himself decidedly more of a man than the bitter undergraduate who had made

a mess of a college year and shipped before the mast rather than face the music at home.

As the wand-like bowsprit told off the low-hung stars on the vast blackboard ahead of them, an inky curtain slowly raised itself in the south, one end curved ominously, like the claw of a giant bird of prey. There was a low rumble of thunder and a few minutes later a distinct, angry growl. Sheet lightning scampered across the blackness from one end to the other. The wind lulled and the rigging slackened; the freshness of the air was succeeded by a heavy, still dampness, through which the lanterns aft bleared greasily here and there as the crew moved about in confused haste making things secure about the decks.

Cardot at the beginning of these preparations had joined the mate amidships and waited in respectful silence until the operation of lashing in a dory was completed.

"Can't I help, Mr. Sessions?" he asked. His status was that of passenger, but he had seen enough of sea-life to know that the idle are despised when serious work is ahead.

"You never can tell about these squalls at this time o' year," said the mate when the men had gone pattering forward to their next job. "It looks to me like we're in for a blow. I've smelled it for days, and the glass hasn't been any too steady. You stand by," he finished appreciatively, "for we may need every willing hand in a few minutes!"

The boy turned his face to the approaching tumult of elements. The parry and thrust of sharp lightning was now supported by the heavy artillery of the heavens, and a tremor of exhilaration passed down his spine. The wind

began to flow like a swift, invisible river out of the darkness ahead of him; the rigging tautened and strained, vibrating and humming. A loose tackle banged against the mainmast, was silent and banged again.

In a rapture of enthusiasm Cardot went below and reappeared shortly in sou'wester, slicker and boots. The wind in that time had gone to a gale. He took his post again and watched with a sort of reverent and detached awe as a ghostlike wall of angry foam and rain moved down upon the vessel.

The initial slap of the storm struck her with surprising suddenness. She seemed to creak and groan aloud from every timber, burying her nose deeply under tons of sea water. There was a lull and the old bark righted herself wearily. The rain swept the decks in obliterating torrents, beating down the seas that leaped to meet it. Cardot, enclosed in its wet folds, staggered inboard, overpowered. There came more wind, screaming gusts that shot rain and foam in horizontal lines across the deck. The heavy metal frame of a skylight, torn loose, flew seaward like a gull.

Cardot made his way laboriously to the cabin, but found scant comfort there. He wanted to help. Strangely enough it seemed, too, that far back in his boyish day-dreams he had passed through just such a storm; only then he was at the helm, holding the vessel in the teeth of the gale, his confident bearing giving heart to the cowed crew, while the one fair lady passenger gazed at him so adoringly that he must needs relax his stern seriousness to smile on her.

He pushed through the door again and in the drenched companionway met Mr. Sessions.

"Come with me, lad," said the mate shortly. Cardot followed him up the stairs and into the black, howling confusion.

"Here's the jackstay," bawled the mate, pulling toward him a taut, whistling line that led forward into the blackness. The two men hung on the line, waiting for a lull before they could venture along it.

"Hurricane!" yelled Mr. Sessions in Cardot's ear. "Dangerous semicircle . . . have to carry sail long as possible 'fore we heave to."

There came a slackening of the wind and they were able to reach the mainmast. Cardot climbed behind the mate up the ratlines to the foretop, holding grimly on while the gusts tried with fiendish ingenuity to tear them loose. The task of shortening sail seemed hopeless, but Cardot was working desperately when a loose end of canvas struck him a stinging blow across the face. The next instant he was in the water clinging to the broken topmast, part and parcel of the storm itself.

II

The sun rose and set and rose again before Cardot opened his eyes on a broad and glistening beach. He lay propped against a sand dune, and the realization that he was still alive was extremely painful in his nauseating state of semi-consciousness. His head was cracking and before his feverish eyes horrible figures alternated with a medley of human faces. It seemed to him that he had been watching them for an eternity and they bored him intensely. They were faces with the cruel yet guileless leer of the savage, whose features even as he watched were transformed by degrees into those of grotesque monsters and then of hideous hags, whose long, lifeless hair, gray as the stormy ocean, floated and undulated in his sick imagination.

After what seemed aeons of helpless gazing, one of the faces began to predominate, that of an old man with long, grisly beard, bushy, crag-like brows, and pitted, blue-seamed nose. The hair that covered the face seemed to flow from the nostrils in two divergent streams. A battered and faded military forage cap, vintage of '64, was half buried, like a long-deserted bird's nest, in the umbrageous shock of the tousled head. The expression on the face fluctuated between benignity and horrible bestiality.

Cardot presently became aware that cool liquid was being forced down his parched throat and that the owner of the face was leaning over him, administering a drink of water. Every molecule of his body was crying for the

precious drops; and the face, with its senile blue eyes, became fixed in its kindness.

When the old man saw that his efforts had produced results, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead and stood alternately grinning and staring at the castaway.

"Well, how are you now?" he asked.

"Better," answered Cardot wanly. Finding himself safe he slipped comfortably into a comatose sleep. Since it is the blessed quality of abject misery that it cannot be long remembered, his hours of desperate struggle while clinging to his spar, seemed far behind him.

He awoke again to find his friend still standing over him, gazing down with the profound curiosity of a child.

"I don't suppose you can walk?" he asked finally. Cardot made a futile effort to get on his feet and fell back exhausted.

"Don't try, sonny. Wait till John comes up. We can carry you. That's our business, you know—carryin' in the flotsam of the sea."

Bared by the low tide the beach was a glaring expanse fully five hundred feet wide, and looking across the sands, dizzy and faint-headed, Cardot made out another figure struggling, like an ant with a beetle, under an apparently impossible piece of wreckage. His trousers were rolled above his knees, disclosing legs magnificently muscled. With a final effort he discharged his load beyond the high-water mark on the shore and approached. The shipwrecked man began to wonder if nightmare were not still upon him when he found that this newcomer was the exact counterpart of the other, even to the venerable army cap.

They picked Cardot up and carried him with

ease down the beach, then up a sand dune. They crossed the slope of this, with its scant sea-vegetation, and passing through a breach in a veritable chevaux-de-frise of Spanish bayonets, came into a clearing littered with the vomit of the sea. There were teredo-eaten timbers, hatch-covers with tops of torn tarpaulin; there were rotting life-preservers, cocoanut shells, an empty wine bottle. A mute, inglorious figurehead that once, resplendent with gilt, had swept haughtily over the seas at the prow of a noble schooner, now turned her sightless eyes despairingly to the heavens, sans gilt, sans half a nose, sans everything.

Out of this oceanic hotchpotch a crazy structure reared itself, like a hillock of the same material. Here, slowing up a little, they passed through a door marked in porcelain, **Captain's Cabin,** the entrance to a sanctum before which many a timid sailor had once quailed before waking the "old man."

"Welcome to our home," said one of the brothers.

. . . . .

For a week Cardot was a very sick man, but as the fever brought on by his exposure abated, he began to take interest in his new surroundings. The old men, whose names he learned were Eben and John, were as happy over the recovery of their guest as parents might have been over a child that had passed a crisis. They had relieved each other in ministering to his wants, and Eben had transferred his shipmaking from the workshop, which adjoined the shack, to this general living and sleeping room. The interior of the place savored as much of the sea as the outside; there was above everything an inextinguishable

salt-water-soaked smell, but the improvised bunks, rough tables and chairs had been scrubbed white.

Awakening one day from a refreshing sleep, the young man found Eben deeply engrossed in fashioning a diminutive sloop. Cardot lay quietly marvelling at the nicety with which he shaped its fragile parts. He was stepping a wand-like mast but looked up from his work for a moment to call out cheerily:

"Well, how's the sailorman today?"

"Entirely well. Fine and dandy! I'll have to be moving on now. I can't impose too long on good nature."

"Take your time, sonny. You're not imposing on anybody here—not a soul. This is an event in the life of two such hermits as John and myself. You know life moves pretty much in a groove for two old cranks like us."

He had put down his mast and, looking indulgently toward his patient, asked:

"How'd you like a little broth, some bluefish chowder?"

"Fine! I feel starved today."

"You know," continued Eben, as he bestirred himself to light a small kerosene stove in the room, "I pitched my line out from the beach yesterday sundown and pulled in five of these beauties, one after the other, fast as I could throw out. Seems a shame to make a chowder of 'em, but I laid a couple out to broil. Fish is the leadin' article of our diet, and after that comes grits and—"

Cardot interrupted his garrulousness. "Tell me some of the news. Is the United States in the War yet, or are they still writing notes?"

"Well, sonny, we don't keep in touch with the world much, but when the last newspaper drifted

in it begun to look like it was just a question of days." He looked up from his cooking, and it may have been a reflection of the flame, but Cardot thought he saw the old man's eye flash. "Sonny, I would trade anything I have in this world, or the next either for that matter, for your youth and the privilege of getting in that war."

His animation amazed the younger man, who began to wonder if he were really as old as he appeared.

"I've seen my threescore and ten, but I'd help —if they gave me the chance."

Cardot was curious. He associated the forage caps with this sudden martial fervor. There was something in the past of the pair that had brought them to this isolated place; plainly the mill-race of life had lodged them in its backwaters.

"I was coming back to enlist," explained Cardot. "If you could furnish me with a pencil and paper, I might write home for a few necessities and at the same time tell them of my mishaps and the good Samaritans that have taken such care of me."

"I'll do that, but first get on the outside of this chowder. You'll feel stronger."

"On the table, if you please," said Cardot, as Eben brought the steaming bowl to the bunk-side. "The very smell of that puts new life into a fellow."

He rose unsteadily and sat down before it.

"Delicious!" he cried, when a spoonful had been cooled down to drinking point. "You're an A-number-one cook."

"We make out all right as far as cooking is concerned," the other answered, pleased with the compliment.

"You two do all the housekeeping, don't you? There isn't a white woman within miles of here, I suppose?"

"There's a family of pretty well-to-do folks that live across the river about three miles down; their little girl rides over and looks in on us every now and then. But on the whole we don't miss 'em, and John wouldn't have 'em around. He's a woman-hater. It was all along of a woman that we happen to be here."

"But how about the little girl?" asked Cardot interested.

"She's the finest little woman on earth," the old man declared earnestly.

"The exception that proves the rule," smiled the other, "there's always an exception, isn't there?"

"Oh, I ain't the fire-eater John is. He's always railin' and callin' them the 'curse of mankind.' And we get along pretty well by ourselves. We're set in our ways; we know just what's going to happen the next day and the next day after that. The War can rage on, the whole world go to pot, and here we'd be collecting some of the wreckage of it."

"You just said you'd like to help," reminded Cardot.

The old man raised his head and looked at him with level eyes. "You're right; we're two old frauds. I allow a woman's influence would have worked wonders with us," he added regretfully.

"It's a miracle you're not barbarians as it is," Cardot was taking the mischievous, nagging interest in an elder's deficiencies. "There's some dispute about the derivation of the word, but I always imagined it came from the Latin barba, or 'beard.'"

"I guess if plenty of hair is any sign, we do come pretty close to that," Eben admitted sheepishly. His tone became more serious. "We're lucky to be on this earth; deserters in wartime ain't always treated with too much courtesy."

"Deserters!"

The old man nodded.

"You don't seem to care who knows it," said Cardot amazed.

"It's been a long time ago, sonny, and I don't suppose they want us any more—mebbe not, anyway. When the Civil War broke out, John and me joined a New York regiment (we were from up-state) and it was one of the first to be sent South. I remember just as though it was yesterday, a-marching down Broadway and the people cheering like mad."

He paused and looked impressively at his listener.

"I told you it was on account of a woman that we happen to be hidin' out here—a girl from our home town. John and I are twins and I can tell you we had many a scrap when we were boys over that same girl. We were all three raised together, you might say.

"Well, she was goin' to a finishing school in New York City while we were in camp. She used to come out there to see us, looking changed and handsome in her smart clothes, and more coquettish than ever. Just before we left she came out once more, cried and laughed, said she loved both of us, told us to fight glorious for the Union and for her, and a whole lot of other things."

Cardot marvelled at these words, and the old man's talk of love. His imagination vaulted the years back to the hour when two bashful country

boys stood, in the glory of their new uniforms, before the capricious mistress of their hearts.

"Naomi wrote to John and me, usually on the same day. If he was to get his letter first, I was disappointed and if I got mine first, the poor lad would be downhearted all day. Well, the war dragged on from year to year; we were in camp near Memphis—that was the winter of '63. One day John received a letter and I saw it was from Naomi. He looked at me kind of triumphantly and opened the envelope slow, though I knew his heart was going pitty-pat, like mine always did. He hadn't read very far before he turned as pale as the paper in his hand and I knew something was wrong. 'Read this!' he said in a hard voice, handin' the letter to me.

"In it she went on to tell how much she thought of us, and then wound up by sayin' that by the time that letter reached us she would be the wife of another man, a lieutenant, and wouldn't we both congratulate her. I was thunderstruck, but John took it awful hard and lay down on his cot, white and sick. I never had realized before just how serious the matter had got. John and I couldn't both have married the girl, could we?"

"Not very conveniently," said Cardot.

"The next morning we were sent with a squad on a foragin' expedition. We surrounded several houses and got a few hams out of the smokehouses. All the livestock had been driven into the swamps and only the Confederates knew where to find them. John and I was comin' back about dusk to join our squad at a farmhouse, when all of a sudden he stopped.

"'Eben,' says he, in an unnatural voice, 'I ain't going back.'

"'What d'ye mean?' I says, 'what's the matter with ye?'

"'I just mean what I said; I ain't going back. I'm sick of it all.' With that he threw his gun in a creek and started into the swamp.

"I shouted and run after him, yellin' for him to halt, but it only made him go faster. When I finally come up on him, I begged and pleaded with him, telling him of the terrible disgrace to the family. He broke down and cried after that and when he was calmer he was willin' to go back.

"It was getting dark and though we started back in the direction we had come, we soon found we were lost. We wandered around until we were plumb exhausted, breaking through heavy underbrush and fordin' creeks, trying to find our way out. Well, sir, it was five days before we finally did get out. The insects 'bout ate us alive at night and the cold moon looked down tauntin'-like, as though to say: 'I see some soldiers a-lookin for you two.'

"When we got out the swamp we kept a-goin'. How we got down here is a long story. We traveled mostly by night and managed to dodge the rebels; we kept ourselves alive with berries and a hog or so that we shot in the woods. So you see we are deserters, and then again we ain't."

"And the caps?" asked Cardot, puzzled over these battered mementoes.

"We didn't have any others," said the old man evasively.

Then Cardot understood; they were the last vestiges of what once represented a sturdy patriotism. They were symbols.

III

There is great virtue in wishing and wishing hard, a phenomenon which might well cause an atheist to wonder whether, after all, there is not something in the efficacy of prayer. It behooves us to wish for the right things for, right or wrong, the chances are that our ardent desires will be fulfilled, either with the passage of time or with amazing suddenness.

The old men had started on one of their rare visits to town, leaving their guest to entertain himself as best he might. Cardot was gaining strength but was still too weak to venture out very far.

Through the clear air the break of the surf came to his ears in a prolonged sibilant boom, repeated monotonously, like the little sounds a playful mother makes to delight her child. He would have liked to be out there in the sunshine, watching the long Atlantic swell roll proudly in. He could picture the mischievous foam detaching itself from the parent wave to run nimbly up the beach, tumble the periwinkles about and set them digging frantically into new places. The antics of these tiny many-colored mollusks had never failed to amuse hm. He longed to stroll slowly along the broad, elastic beach, admiring the flashing gulls and the shimmering veil of mist which draped the distances; but mostly he longed for companionship, for the sight and touch of a woman. It seemed ages since he had seen one, and he smiled as he compared himself to a friend who had once told Cardot his sensations on

seeing a white woman after six months' bush-whacking in Philippine wilds. This man, it seemed, had followed her to church and for a solid hour could only sit and stare . . . such a boon was too great to be vouchsafed him in his present situation, he thought.

The day wore into afternoon. By great good fortune he had found a book in the shack with which he could while away some of his time, a swollen and sea-stained copy of "David Copperfield." On re-reading it had pleased him even more than when he had first devoured it as a boy, for with its genial characters and comfortable illustrations it seemed to have been specially designed for his surroundings. He was in Mr. Pegotty's "ark," momentarily awaiting the return of Little Em'ly.

The door had opened and a flood of sunlight filled the room. There was something supernatural about it, something ethereal, for he had heard no footsteps. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. Just beyond the threshold a divinity in riding habit had paused, startled.

"You've come to the wrong place, haven't you?" Cardot stammered. Surely, he thought, such an apparition of delight could have nothing in common with this wretched hovel, the dilapidation of which, by contrast, was now complete.

She smiled with the merest trace of confusion, but rather more of amusement and her manner became more confident.

"No," she answered, "this is the right place. Where is Uncle Eben? We heard by 'grapevine' that he had rescued a man from the sea."

"I'm the man from the sea," said Cardot, still gratefully marvelling. "I am thinking of what wonders a moment may bring forth. Just before

you came in I was literally perishing for companionship."

"I have brought some flowers and fruit along, and a few magazines. Back numbers, I'm afraid." She smiled as she placed them on the table.

"Thanks just the same," he assured her fervently.

While she busied herself setting the room in order and arranging the flowers in the hitherto useless wine bottles his eyes followed her with a sick man's devotion. No detail escaped him from the tips of the stoutly laced boots to the halo of bright strands escaped from the glory of her chestnut hair.

"You're from the Middle West," he announced abruptly. He had deduced her nativity from her accent and manner; this was a combination of brisk wholesomeness, love of the outdoors and withal the unmistakable femininity so characteristic of the girl of the plains.

"Illinois," she laughed, still busy with her flowers, "though father and I divide our time pretty well between Florida and New York City." She was contemplating a magnolia, to which she had given a parting touch, with an air of complete abstracton that fascinated him. She left the flower abruptly, however, and turned to him energetically. "Let me see what I can do to make you more comfortable. That looks like a mighty hard pillow."

He raised his head and she shook out the pillow, patted it and replaced it cool and airily fragrant from the touch of her hand. He had been quick to appreciate this, and also to note with approval the wide, brown eyes, soft and deep, yet guarding their privacy; the small nose with

its faint freckles, and the arresting small red mouth.

"May I not learn the name of my benefactress?" he asked doubtfully. He had not entirely satisfied himself that his visitor was mundane and was actually afraid that if he offended this vision in the slightest manner it would vanish into thin air. "My name is Jules Cardot."

"And mine is Consuela Childers," she answered simply.

"I feel like a pious fraud, Miss Childers," he said, reassured, "I was sitting up yesterday and I suppose I will have to give up my privilege of being a sick man."

"That's a pity," she pouted, "I am contemplating nursing if father will permit, and you were to be my first patient."

"In that event I shall most certainly have to stage a relapse for you."

She smiled whimsically: "Do, please."

"You are putting a premium on genteel debility. I was on my way home to enlist in the Aviation Corps, so you musn't tempt me."

"The Aviation Corps! That's thrilling," she said.

"It's dangerous, too," insisted Cardot with the hurt air of a boy whose adolescent aspirations are not fully appreciated. "But above all things," he continued enthusiastically, "it will give me a chance to do something worth while, something big. I have longed to do that all my life and here is my opportunity. In this war the humblest doughboy will be what the Spaniards call an hidalgo, 'son of somebody.' "

"I expect to do my bit, too," with a little toss of the head. "The women will have their oppor-

tunity, also, this time. They won't be the stay-at-homes—at least not all of them."

"That's fine," he agreed. "I suppose everybody, at one time or another, burns to do something that will raise him above the foothills of mediocrity. I know there has been a great deal of vanity in my ambition. By twenty-five at the outside, I had promised myself to be an author and a rich man; by that time, too, I was to have married the most beautiful and talented woman in the world. I was going to be a recluse and a student when I wanted to be and a man about town when that mood struck me. The latter, being the easier, is what I have most achieved, and now when I look back on the time I have wasted, I am appalled. Yet I have discovered that a person can accomplish wonders with just a modicum of sustained effort."

"You are either up in an airplane or down in a well, aren't you?" she asked archly. "You are young. You still have time . . ."

"No, I haven't," he broke in. "I am still on the right side of thirty, but I wouldn't for worlds delude myself that I have any too much time on my hands. A man of my age becomes well acquainted with his limitations. Begins to learn what he can do, and what he can't do, and just what he can expect of himself under the best conditions. He is generally disillusioned and penitent by that time—I know I am. I also know right from wrong; yet that doesn't prevent me from straying occasionally from the straight and narrow path. No, Miss Childers," he finished earnestly, "I don't want to be a chaos any longer. I must produce if it is but the 'pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product.'"

She was nursing a knee of her corduroy

trousers and listening with the flattering attention that makes complaining schoolboys of men. She had the answer to the riddle ready for him.

"You should have married early and had some one to take care of you and direct your energies along the right channel. A good woman would have done that."

"I know," he said soberly, "but it seems I have always been waiting for the apotheosis of love to come to me—the kind they fill books with. Not that I haven't been in love; I'm half-way in love right now! Or all the way, if you'll accept the amendment. It's a patient's license to fall in love with his nurse, isn't it?" He watched her closely for the sign to advance or retreat, such being the first feint in the average American courtship which begins not in Heaven, or conclave of parents, but in flirtation between strangers.

"I suppose that's your privilege," she replied coolly.

Not unduly encouraged he continued, seeking to draw her fire:

"I have been in love any number of times. I have been swept off my feet by a pretty face; sometimes it was a pretty ankle. That's what many people think of as love, and what more marriages in America are based on than you may perhaps imagine. That's one reason, I presume, why I haven't married—because I can't exalt a union which has that as a foundation to the eminence of a sacred institution; in other words, I can't idealize it. So," he shrugged, "there you are."

"You just haven't met the right woman," she said softly. She had listened intently with a mixture of sympathy and amusement in her eyes.

Cardot stared his admiration. Was she an actress, and this a rôle she was playing? At any rate, he told himself, here was his idea of beauty in woman: animation first, high animal spirits tempered by intellect and understanding. And she was good to look upon. Her features were regular, her teeth sound and white; yes, she was beautiful, but there was nothing of the insipidity that attaches to fair beauties. She consulted a mannish leather wrist-watch and rose.

"You're not going?" he asked, and she laughed at his tone of dismay.

"Yes, I have to. Father will be wondering what has become of me. I have some orders, now, that I wish obeyed," she said authoritatively. "In the first place, you are not to leave until I have called again. Then, perhaps, I'll discharge you as a well man."

"Unless you return soon, I'll be on my way. I'm sound as a dollar now."

"Very well," she agreed carelessly. "I'll say good-bye then." She stood a moment, her lithe figure framed in the doorway, a modern Diana, whose clothes served rather to accentuate her grace.

"Just a minute," he called after her; it had taken an appreciable space of time to summon his courage. "Suppose I look you up before I leave; I have to hear from home first, anyway."

"That will be capital!" she exclaimed delightedly, coming back beside the bunk. "Oh, I have it. I'll call for you with the buggy tomorrow. You can visit with father and me until you feel able to travel."

"It sounds too good to be true." He could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. "I'll be

happy to accept, if you don't think I'll be in the way. Hadn't you better ask your father?"

She laughed shortly. Parental consent was apparently a minor consideration to this daughter of the Twentieth Century.

"Dad never interferes with anything I want to do. He's the dearest old thing."

"I'm sure he must be," he agreed. Her attitude now was expressive of buoyant comraderie. Cardot, in a transport of delight, found himself gazing at the firm white hand and supple fingers that held the riding crop, wondering if he might reach forth and hold it, and before he realized it, his desire was an accomplished fact. She yielded her hand naturally and with no trace of shyness or embarrassment.

After a moment of silence, she said: "I must be going. I'll see you again tomorrow."

He heard her picking her way over the litter outside and with a sense of sweet fatigue occasioned by the excitement of her visit, he turned to the wall of his bunk. He closed his eyes and opened them with a start. No, it hadn't been a dream. It was actual reality. He rehearsed all the incidents from the time he had been thrown into the sea; then from the time he had embarked before the mast (it took but the fraction of a second longer) to this morning's visit. They were all in sequence. "Romance has sought me out in this little hut," he mused in a dazed manner. "Here of all places I meet the woman of all women." And then in as brief a space of time he projected his life—their lives—into the very imminent future. War shorn of all its glamour, soldiers bagging their prey with sardonic cruelty, tangled heaps of massacred humanity, twisted burning planes fallen to earth, the funeral pyres

of their pilots. . . . Consuela a war-bride; Consuela in widow's weeds. It was no time for happy thoughts of a home with her at his side, with such a terrifying background. He laughed and chided himself. Why should he imagine these wild things? It was absurd, in the first place, to think of this exquisite woman as the wife of an outcast. He would live only in the present, that was the war-philosophy he had evolved for himself anyway, and the immediate prospects were very pleasant. He murmured her euphonious name again and fell asleep.

. . . . . .

"I didn't aim to wake you up," said Uncle Eben, though Cardot was inclined to doubt his word. "What do all these things mean?" he demanded with a well-simulated appearance of wrath. With his leonine hair, it required but little affectation to give him a ferocious mien.

"It means we have had a visitor, Watson," smiled Cardot.

"A woman?"

"A lady—Miss Childers," Cardot corrected.

"Oh, her," he growled, much in the manner of a pacified mastiff. Cardot sensed the old man's quick feeling of gratitude for her attentions to his protege.

IV

As Consuela's horse picked its clean-footed way homeward her heart exulted and the mist of joy that filmed her eyes made everything appear gloriously unreal. It was altogether a different world from that in which she had begun the day; the sun drinking up the water of the sea over the breasts of the sand dunes was the revelation of sublime love, such an image as she had seen depicted in the family Bible at home, and as she looked to the golden rim of the clouds, she almost expected to see the Archangel standing there with outstretched, welcoming arms.

Some women find their mates among the ranks of the "good providers" and are content; many more succumb to ardent wooing—the biological eagerness of the male; others sacrifice themselves to their vanity and thus dispel the fear of the dull tragedy of spinsterhood. But into the lives of others their man is cast like the shipwrecked sailor; for him they have kept their lamp trimmed and burning against his arrival.

The admirers of such women may be legion. They generally have the appeal of their sex in a high degree; but though, in our superficial society, they encourage men and play the game, yet they repel before it is too late. Their ideal looms vividly before them in the crisis and the attentions of the man before them become hateful.

It mattered not a whit to her that she had known Cardot only a brief hour. She did not know his origin, nor would that have mattered. There was in her soul the transcendent radiance

of original insight—woman's intuition—that here at last was the man for whom she had waited. And on the morrow he was to come to her home; the same roof would cover them at night. A smile of confidence lingered on her lips as she spurred her horse into a gallop. Her plans were consummated; he would be grappled to her soul before he left; there was not in her mind the slightest doubt of her ability to do this.

. . . . . .

Cardot was waiting for Consuela as she drove up outside the enclosure in a mule-drawn buggy. She came inside as he was making his adieux and thanking the two old men. "Well," she announced, "here I am!" Neither Eben nor John exhibited any hostility, but on the contrary beamed their approval, maintaining a tongue-tied silence. Finally Uncle Eben said: "You're in mighty good hands, my lad."

"I'll bring him back to see you before he leaves," she answered.

"This is my horseless carriage," said Consuela, as Cardot went through the motions of helping her in, just managing to touch her elbow before she had gained the seat. The mule looked back at him with the slow scorn of an old-timer.

"Are you feeling better today?" she asked, after she had coaxed the animal into movement.

"Very much, thank you, but I am determined to remain a convalescent until I learn your further orders."

"Which are that you hurry and get well. The moon is wonderful on the beach and we have swimming parties almost every night."

"And I am to be included?" he asked almost breathlessly. "That is certainly incentive for rapid recovery."

Her animated features were betraying the pleasure she felt in his company. He wondered if he read them aright, and then the uncomfortable thought crossed his mind that he was merely the victim of a fantastic whim of an impulsive young lady. He would be placed on exhibition before her father and friends and when her interest lagged, either through satiety or the ridicule of others, she would release him much as he had released gophers imprisoned in his boyhood days. He had no evidence on which to base such a conclusion so he was surprised at the tenacity of the idea.

The mule was pulling the monotonously creaking buggy through a jungle of cypress, bay and sweet gum trees, the cypress lofty and bearded with moss, the smaller growth that lined the road at their base a pageant of color.

"They look like old men with fancy neckties, don't they?" she said to break the silence.

"They do, at that," he smiled. "Just as the two hermits might look decked out in store-bought clothes. But tell me," he asked anxiously, as the lurking doubt recurred to his mind, "don't you feel that you are taking chances in bringing home a stray dog like myself? Are you in the habit of doing things like this?"

"My first offense," she assured him lightly, "but why should I feel that I am taking any chances?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose women are better judges of men than men are of women. Perhaps men are more of a staple article. But I don't understand for the life of me what would interest you the least bit in me." He was really curious to know.

"Well," she drawled, giving him a timid sidewise glance, "in the first place you are nice."

He laughed aloud in the pure joy that this naive statement gave him.

"That means, I suppose, that I am fastidious, refined or pleasing to the palate."

"Pleasing to the palate?" she repeated reddening. "I mean you are rather nice to have around."

"That's very kind of you," he replied gratefully. He refrained from expressing reciprocal sentiments, fearing that they might appear fulsome.

They had emerged from the jungle into a sweet-scented forest of virgin pine, the floor of which was thickly carpeted with brittle needles crackling under the sharp wheels of the buggy.

"This is father's grove," said Consuela. "He has never boxed it for turpentine. I wouldn't let him."

"It's wonderful and peaceful," he agreed, a tinge of dejection in his voice. "It hardly seems possible that people can be tearing at each other's throats in other parts of the world." The incubus of fire, sackings and butcheries—of civilization gone to pot—seemed always to assail him with greater vigor amid the eternal harmonies of nature, land or sea.

"There's our house," said Consuela, pointing with her whip to a clump of orange trees surmounted by a roof. Cardot was vaguely disappointed at its unpretentiousness; somehow or other he had prepared himself for a colonial mansion, lording the woods with a chaste pillared eminence. It proved to be a cottage, white with green trimmings. Before it bloomed oleanders, hibiscus and guavas; to the rear he could see

chickens, shaking and dusting themselves in the sand in the hot shade of the orange trees. With the exception of the small home plot there was no cultivated or cleared land in sight; just the clean pine grove stretching upward to the house and sloping gently downward from the front of it.

A portly man in vest and shirt-sleeves came from the opposite side of the house, examined some shrubbery intently and then looked up in the direction of the buggy.

"That's Dad," said Consuela, giving the reins an embarrassed tug.

Her father waited for them, assisted his daughter to alight and then thrust a large, speckled and sandy-haired hand to Cardot.

"The pestle-tail brought you home, did he, Peggy?" he asked bluffly. "Glad to meet you, sir."

"This is Mr. Cardot, father," said Consuela, not to be cheated out of a proper introduction.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cardot." He mounted the steps ahead of them. "Come right in."

He strode through the room, put aside, with a brittle sound, some bamboo hangings and passed into the hall. Consuela excused herself. "I have to see how dinner is progressing," she explained.

Cardot seated himself rather helplessly in the combination living-room and library and, picking up a magazine, turned over the leaves in a desultory manner. There was within him a little sense of anti-climax; Consuela, the Lady Bountiful, ranging the "moors" and the desert places, emerged not from an ancestral estate, but from a very matter-of-fact stable yard at the rear of a snug cottage. He had an uncomfortable feeling

that the Consuela of faultless riding clothes was a pose, a feeling which he immediately and indignantly stifled, chiding himself unmercifully for permitting such an idea to be harbored for an instant. A second later he had translated this imperfection into a lovable feminine frailty, pathetically small and helpless when contrasted with his own mountainous heap of besetting sins and weaknesses. After all, were not the whole world jongleurs and actors?

He put down his magazine and looked about the room. It was large and comfortable and what its name implied—a living-room. Unfinished fancy work lay on the stained-oak mission table, while the racks beneath were crowded with periodicals, among which Cardot discerned movie pictorials, the National Geographic, and several drear varieties of farm magazine. The inevitable mail order catalogue was there also. Spaced around the wall stood three dissimilar bookcases. One contained a faultless set of classics, a compendium of ancient and modern literature, which the visitor imagined must be "uncut gems," while the others held small sets and a heterogeneous mixture of best sellers, college textbooks, works on animal surgery, and nondescripts. There was a what-not cabinet, rescued apparently from the grim parlor of a generation back, and a large brick hearth with substantial fire-dogs. Of the large denim-covered divan with its profusion of embroidered sofa pillows, Cardot entirely approved.

The latticed door in the rear banged and he heard the voice of the master calling down imprecations on the epidermis of one of his laborers.

"Darn your hide, Jim, you mean to tell me

you haven't put the spokes in that wheel yet?" he vociferated. "I asked you particularly to finish that job today. What in the world's got into you lately? I swear . . ."

"Now, bossman," the wheedling negro began, "I jes' ain't had the time; now, Mister Dan, that's a fact, sure as I'se a foot high. But I'll git to it before sundown; she'll be ready to ride tomorrow."

"You haven't had anything but time. All right, if that job isn't finished by this time tomorrow, I'm going to run you so far from this place, it'll take you a year to walk back."

Jim guffawed loudly and Cardot heard the door close on a dimuendo of his laughter. Presently Jim's voice came again: "Mister Dan, you doan want dem old shoes, does you? If I'se gwine to have to walk for a year, I'se sure gwine need some shoes."

"Those are my fishing shoes, Jim," Mr. Dan answered. "Besides, they wouldn't fit you."

"I'll make 'em fit," said the darkey confidently.

"Well, go ahead, take 'em," the other consented.

Mr. Childers entered, redolent of yellow soap, and took his seat heavily. "Mr. Cardot, the good niggers have all left the South; all gone East to work in the munition plants. That Jim," he continued, looking up at his daughter who had come in and seated herself on the arm of his chair, "is becoming more shiftless every day."

"Yes, old dear," she replied as she ran her fingers soothingly through his iron-grey hair, "I heard what you had to say to him. Do you know you gave him one of the few decent pairs of shoes you have left?"

Dinner was announced at this juncture and they

adjourned to the dining-room. Consuela presided anxiously, apologizing for the shortcomings of a wall-eyed and thin-shanked negro girl that she had hastily impressed into service, disguising her as a maid by impaling a white linen cap on her tufts of wool.

Cardot ate almost voraciously of the abundant fried chicken and white-brown biscuits, generously spread with wild honey in its comb, of which there was a great quantity in an immense earthenware bowl on the table.

"We cut a bee-tree a few days ago," explained Mr. Childers, "I reckon John the Baptist didn't fare so badly in the wilderness when he had to make out on wild honey."

"No, indeed," said Cardot. "What I could never understand was what he could see in locusts as an article of diet."

"Oh, they used them right along in the early days," replied the other. "They pulled off the legs and wings and roasted them. They ate them stewed, boiled, fried, and ground up and made into cakes. There was a Libyan nation, mentioned by Herodotus, that ate them with milk, just as we eat our cereals today."

Cardot stared his amazement at this fountain-head of information opened before him. Consuela laughed with twinkling eyes, "They call Dad a 'walking encyclopedia' around here," she said.

The meal was at an end and the dishes cleared away.

"Do you smoke?" asked the host in a genial post-prandial tone, "I've got a Cuban fellow down in Tampa that sends me up some cigars that the cigarmakers make for themselves, so they ought to be good. At least, I like them first-

rate." He was fumbling in a cupboard drawer and finally extracted two large, loosely-rolled black cigars from a paper sack. "Now, let's adjourn to the porch," he suggested when they had them lit. "It's cooler out there."

. . . . . .

Later in the afternoon Consuela proposed a ride and Jim at her request hitched up Janus, the mule, and brought him to the front of the house.

"We'll go to Mirror Springs—that's not far from here. You see, I don't want to tax your strength."

"Don't worry about me, young lady," he said appreciatively, although in reality he was fighting off, as best he could, a languor brought on by the exertions of the day.

Consuela took the reins and when they had started, she saw that he had brought a book along. "What is it?" she asked.

"It's the 'book of verse,'" he answered apologetically. "I was reading it, but didn't intend to take it with us."

"Perhaps we'll have a chance to read a poem or two."

He stole another admiring glance, recognizing instinctively a fellow of the freemasonry of book-lovers. Indeed, she was splendid, this self-reliant, unconscious Diana of the pines.

A mile or so through the flat-woods and they came suddenly to a hard road, on which Janus' hoofs began a sharp tattoo. Above them young orange groves were prettily set in the side of a hill. Then Consuela pulled the mule into the sand-road again and on through a jungle of palm and magnolia to the sward which bordered a deep crystal spring, a veritable underground river,

whose surplus waters flowed off in a wide stream.

Here they climbed eagerly out and walked to the bank where they stood looking into the clear, cool depths, down where a fallen oak lay submerged, long since coated with milk-white flageolets of sulphurous moss which fluttered in the upcoming water. Fish were swimming fearlessly around and a large Florida trout came close and turned saucy eyes at them.

"The rascal knows we haven't any fishing tackle with us," smiled Cardot.

"Shall we sit down and read our book?" asked Consuela.

"Fine," he agreed, and they found a place on the soft level grass.

"Now," she said, "what poem shall we have, which is your favorite?"

"Oh, any of them," he replied neutrally. "Let's open the book at random."

It was an anthology of British poets of the nineteenth century. She opened to Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and began to read in a quiet and unaffected voice:

> Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
> Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
> Sylvan historian, who can'st thus express
> A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
> What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
> Of deities or mortals, or of both,
> In Tempe or the Dales of Arcady?
> What men or Gods are these? What maidens loth?
> What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
> What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstacy?

Cardot shifted his position and stretched out on his side, resting his head on his hand.

"Are you quite comfortable?" she asked solicitously.

"Quite," he answered. "Just a bit tired."

"You poor thing!" compassionately. "Perhaps we've overdone."

"No, I think not," he said. He was a little provoked at being forced to admit his fatigue, but looked rather longingly at the plaid of her skirt, thinking of the luxury of resting his head there.

"Might I—would you object?" he faltered, dreading a refusal.

"No, of course not," she consented quietly, and when he has disposed himself to his entire satisfaction, she continued:

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but more endear'd,
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou can'st not leave
> Thy song, nor even can those trees be bare;
> Bold lover, never, never can'st thou kiss
> Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.

Thereafter the verses became a jumble of phrases to him and he wandered into a forest of sleep, peopled by the pale shades of gods and heroes. When he awoke he felt certain he had dozed only a few minutes and that it was the silken touch of her sleeve as she put down the book that stimulated him to consciousness. She was looking abstractedly across the spring and crooning softly to herself. He gazed for a moment at her face with its youthful freshness, yet indefinable charm of maturity; at the determined angle of her chin. Then he raised his head and apologized.

She smiled indulgently. "That's the only time men are ever contented—when they're asleep," she said.

"Oh, I don't know about that," he parried good-humoredly, "I feel refreshed, but I'm afraid I've proven an ungallant protege."

A white heron flapped noisily down the quiet stream to the woods on the opposite bank; the face of the pool at their feet grew sombre. The afternoon stillness was succeeded by the shrill screeching of birds and an intermittent bellowing which they both agreed must be a bull alligator, deep in the swamp.

They drove home in the flashing sunset, where clouds and colors seemed grouped about the sun like an ensemble for the final scene of the day.

Neither spoke, until the silence began to be embarrassing. He was wondering how he could tell her how much pleasure he found in her companionship; he wanted to explain how different she was from other girls he had known.

"I hope today hasn't been too hard on you," she said finally.

"Hard!" he answered emphatically. "I have never passed a better; it's been like a dream." Still he could not summon courage to express his thoughts to her. He remembered the chance facetious remark of the day before when he had told her that he was half-way, if not entirely, in love with her, and wondered why he could not repeat it today. No, he decided, it would be both overbold and ungrateful—just the same, there would be much truth in it.

V

When Cardot first thought of directing his footsteps homeward to the United States, after his estrangement of three years, there was in his heart a fibre of bitterness, a sulky resentment, such as a punished child might have for the castigating parent, which was in reality the pique of disappointment. Consciously, he blamed himself for all his shortcomings; subconsciously, the country of his origin was colored by the jaundice of his failure. This petulant state of mind was not by any means stable, for usually when his grievances rose thickest before him there came tidal waves of tender emotion to sweep them away and purify his memory.

The urge to return became strong when the conflagration in Europe got well under way and he saw that the struggle was going to be long and disastrous. It was a time when many a neutral traveler sought the security of his own rooftree, but the corps of American and English surveyors with whom Cardot was engaged in the capacity of recorder could not then conveniently spare him. They so informed him when he once suggested that he should be fighting with the French, being of French descent on his father's side and a bundle of mixed race-memories. He loved France passionately, as, it is said, every one does, but he was thankful to be able to lay the unction of a good excuse to his soul when he saw what a welter of blood the War was becoming. He deplored the canker of fear and indecision which, at bottom, was deterring him from

entering the lists, and devoutly promised himself that should the United States be drawn in he would make amends by immediately returning and enlisting in the Aviation Corps, the branch of the service which, he felt, would exact the greatest courage and would lead him quickest to the front.

Time and the War had almost effaced the sense of defeat that had caused him to chose between suicide and South America. Young, and loving life, he had chosen the latter and brought with him his own anathemas and self-chastisement. What he had done to deserve all this involved matters purely personal to himself, sins of omission mainly which might be peccadilloes to many others. The culmination came with his failure at the end of a college year.

In the first place he had indulged too long and often in day-dreams. Then, in a fatal moment, one of his professors had praised him for a little spurt of work he had done. From that incident his egotism waxed great and was nourished to a point where he felt himself endowed with superior mental gifts that raised him above the level of the poor fellows who had to "bone" for what they learned. He, being favored of the gods, could loiter as long as he wished in Utopia and then, just before examinations, cover the subject with a minimum of effort and dazzle the class with his brilliance. The old story of the hare and tortoise points the same moral. To dream is easier than to do, and so, even while he was imbued with lofty aspirations, fiercely ambitious, the driving force of his energy was not sustained and the borderlands of fancy became more and more alluring.

Cardot consistently maintained through his first

college year a stringent and austere idealism. Sir Toby might have been tempted to exclaim of him: "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" He still held lofty opinions of women. He could not abide the men who made lecherous subjects the burden of their conversation, and those who bragged of amorous successes he put down as bald-faced liars. Nor could he associate the profound, beatific mystery of birth, in which man came "trailing clouds of glory," with ugly stories. How, he pondered, could the holy state of marriage have anything in common with the gratification of the base carnal desires of men?

He had set an exacting standard for himself. Though not wishing to impose it on others, fearing to appear immature or unmanly, he still found the stories disturbing and degrading. Resolutely he tried the life of a recluse for a while, shutting himself in his little dormitory room and denying, as far as was possible, human companionship. He figured that by this process he would be enabled to drink more deeply at the Pierian Spring, but his periods of isolation proved opportunities for more chimerical extravaganzas, in which sex-phantasies irresistibly found expression.

When his imagination had free rein, a certain little girl of his puppy-love days, whom he had worshipped at a distance, became his Beatrice and the central figure of his visions. Out of a shadowy realm, whose ghost-like trees waved frond on frond, pale lords and ladies would come forth from a castle; there were deeds of prowess, jousts and battles; the rescue of a glove at tremendous risk and a smile earned from the lady.

There were rugged mountain scenes—always

with a snowbound hut in the valley. The smoke from its chimney, rising upward like incense in the rare atmosphere, was from his own hearth, before which he sat, one hand on his faithful St. Bernard, in the other a volume of his favorite author. But ere long the figure of his adored one was sure to steal in and take her place on the arm of his chair as his fireside companion.

While airplanes were still in the experimental stage he had flown over mountains, cities and plains in a huge white bird of his invention. The turning of a few valves and the pulling of a lever would put the ornithopter in flight; the eyes of the feathered giant were the windows of his chart-house, and while he controlled this wonderful creature of his imagination, the one woman was beside him, feasting her eyes on her beloved egotist.

The mist would clear and before him the stern, matter-of-fact book of economics would still lie, opened, perhaps, at the chapter on the "Law of Diminishing Values." He had read three sentences and did not know what they contained.

He would shake himself together mentally and exclaim: "This will not do at all."

Once, having heard of the oracular virtues of bibliomancy, he had opened at random a book lying on his table. It was "The Choir Invisible," borrowed from the library for week-end reading. The sentence which caught his attention was the following: "Who does not take pride in his navy, sweeping the high seas of the imagination, but too often departed for some foreign port when the coast defenses need protecting."

At other times, fierce desires which would not obediently stay in their places erupted, throwing the dross of his nature to the surface like vapors

from a seething cauldron. He burned with shame that he could not keep these in due bounds; he prayed for surcease from them, rendering lip-service, rather, by repeating: "God help me! God help me!" like the condemned criminal, but his torments were not softened a whit. A leering phantom spake: "There is no God, or, if there is, who is He to help you? If He made you, He endowed you with the very passions from which you seek relief. They are yours to use and enjoy. . . ." And in an hour of cynicism he went forth and committed himself.

Having sown the act, he reaped the habit, and having sown the habit he reaped a character. From being a young man of exemplary conduct, he slid downward by easy stages until he was classed with the college roués, his virtue, "heaped up in youth and hoarded for age," irretrievably gone. He became bitter, insouciant, slovenly, taking less and less interest in his studies; yet the spectre of failure in any of the subjects he was carrying frightened him at any time into spasmodic studying. As often as he might sleep with textbooks under his pillows, his hope of unconscious cerebration proved vain.

The day came when he came down to Butler Hall, where the results of the mid-term examinations were posted, and found not only that he had failed miserably in Economics, in which he was not sure of himself, but that he was conditioned in one of the English Literature courses. Here he had considered himself impregnable, and his heart failed him.

That day he vowed he would mend his ways. Over and over again he told himself: "It shall not happen again! I will put forth my best efforts and overcome the handicap." He felt a certain

grim pleasure in the anticipation of the struggle for which he was girding his loins about and for the first two weeks of the new term he drove himself mercilessly. He kept his nose in his books, fighting zealously his constitutional propensity to dream, but he soon discovered to his dismay that he could not get to the bottom of the subject or retain what he had read. He had no power to concentrate in spite of his best will.

Defeat seemed to have him in its clutches, for no matter to what pitch he might work up his impulse to achieve, still it was never met by a corresponding energy. Paralysis gripped his faculties; his habits tyrannized over him and held him at their mercy.

The long term was dragging to a close and most of the examinations were over. The students lay in groups under the full-leaved, placid sugar maples, discussing with a languid joy the coming finals and the crowning event, the Graduation Ball. He felt unspeakably alien in this place; even the humbler men in school, men whom he had despised, though unconsciously and unwillingly, had made all of their courses, and now passed Cardot on the street with a smile of superiority. He had failed again in the same two subjects.

The thought of his return home and the inevitable facing of his parents, stigmatized as he felt he was with the disgrace of failure, grew from a small worry into a towering mental obsession. There was no use in his lingering longer at college, he might as well board the train and go somewhere; he should start for home and have it over.

It was a thousand-mile journey and all but the last mile had been run. His heart was palpitating

wildly, the outskirts of the town had been reached and his doom could not be postponed much longer.

He caught a glimpse of the masts in the harbor and his indecision suddenly left him. With a surge of courageous impulse, he told himself it was not yet too late. The train would stop in a minute at the last crossing before rolling into the station. Hurriedly he pulled his suitcase from beneath the seat, jammed his hat on his head and, as the train slowed down, swung himself to the ground and made his way determinedly to the busy wharves.

There were all kinds of ships: schooners with rakish sticks; stolid, square-rigged barks; majestic steel vessels, moving their tentacled cargo booms with the deliberateness of giant crustaceans. In and out among them sturdy little tugs swaggered with the air of importance assumed by opinionated men of small stature; sunburned and tattooed sailors sculled dories across the oily channel. This was the canvas that had thrilled him in his boyhood days when he had traded stamps with the sailors; these were the vessels on which he had passed in imagination from his dull microcosm into the unknown world lying beyond the blue horizon of the day. That evening he crossed the bar as deck-hand on a schooner bound for Santiago, Cuba.

VI

Three days had passed with startling rapidity in the idyllic atmosphere of Pine Crest, a name which Cardot discovered written in nickle-plated studs on a rustic arch at the roadside. He had seen a great deal of Consuela in this time; they had taken a long horseback trip together and lunched in the woods; they had gone for a dip in the pounding surf. In this time they had moralized and philosophized and talked of many things. They had become inseparable companions, but Cardot began to have an uncomfortable feeling that he was perhaps wearing out his welcome. He was therefore vastly relieved when Dan Childers told him he had a job for him.

"I need a bookkeeper and general utility man at the commissary," he said as he pulled the after-supper bag of cigars out of the drawer and handed one to his guest. "How about it? It's a stepping-stone to being a good woodsman."

Cardot accepted and Consuela beamed gratefully at her father.

The following day he entered on his duties, which were light enough and easily mastered. Childers and he found plenty of time for chatting and discussing world events. Between the two there had sprung up the mutual liking of two frank men; back in Jules' recollection some one had once said: "You can trust a man named Dan." But the days dragged and he became contented only when after hours his horse quickened its pace homeward.

In the evenings he read to Consuela and

together they laughed at characters and discussed situations which they mutually recognized. She had a gift of laughter which he loved, but which was at the same time just a bit disconcerting. He wondered whether she might not laugh at him if he should take it into his head to become serious. He kept thinking that he might let himself go much further, but ideas of matrimony were always relegated to a romantic background by a complex of opposing reflections, which he unconsciously lowered as a kind of dimming curtain. He indulged in the luxury of sneering at himself and then applying the balm of self pity. "What have you, a social pariah, to offer this fine girl?" he argued, and again melodramatic pictures of the War would arise. He would soon be in the army, he told himself, so what would be the use? War brides he considered part of the frenzy of the European holocaust and could not approve of them, nor did he like to think of Peggy, his widow, re-marrying some returned hero.

As a matter of fact, he was enjoying the Platonic aspect of their friendship, or love, since it was more than friendship. Their childish confidences thrilled him and he was moved to a chivalrous exultation by the thought of being her spotless knight and protector, conforming to the dearly-beloved precedents of Anglo-Saxon literature and tradition. Thus he remained snugly oblivious of the yearning passion which Consuela concealed within her.

On her part, she patiently awaited the sign. True she did, on the occasion of a dance at the hotel in town to which Cardot had escorted her, deliberately render him miserable and put him

in a torture of jealousy by a generous distribution of her dances among her older acquaintances. He watched her enviously out of the corner of his eye as she floated joyously from arm to arm; he appraised her anew in satin pumps and dainty evening dress and lost all interest in his partner of the moment. Consuela did not slight him; simply made him dubious of his fee simple title.

. . . . . .

President Wilson made an end of note-writing, and War, the inevitable, was declared. Cardot and Childers were discussing the impending entry of the United States when the mail and newspapers were brought in.

Childers drew a deep breath as he displayed the scarehead: **WAR IS DECLARED,** stretching in red across the page. "Well," he said, "it's all over but the shouting."

"All over but the shouting," Cardot echoed hollowly. He stepped out on the little platform before the door. While this was the consummation momentarily expected, he was amazed at the disquietude brought to him by the actual fact. His heart began to beat dismally against his ribs and in the pit of his stomach he felt a sensation of mingled fear and pity for the whole breed of bloodthirsty men whose lust to kill reeks through the pages of history and legend, so that centuries of civilization have failed to gloss it over with the thinnest veneer. It seemed as though the wholesome atmosphere were suddenly diffused with the venom of hatred and in the drowsy soughing of the pines he imagined he heard a bitter note of implacable irony.

Later in the day, as though infected by this poison of hostility, two of the negro hands came to blows after a short argument and began stolidly

slamming and slugging each other after the fashion of black men, their only sound the impacts on their leathery hides. Soon the semi-liquid carmine made its appearance, pouring in viscous rivulets over the sweating faces of both the contestants.

Cardot and Childers were watching from the window, when the negro who was getting the worst pulled a large Barlow knife from his hip pocket and feverishly opened it. At this instant Childers ran out and separated the two, roughly shoving them off in opposite directions. From a distance they glared vindictively at each other for a moment, then trudged away.

"Two of the best darkies we have on the place," said Childers when he returned. "Never knew 'em to fight before."

That night Cardot had a dream so vivid in detail that he remembered it perfectly the next morning when he awoke. Through the medium of the fighting negroes, he was subconsciously transported to African scenes. He saw a high bridge thrown across a chasm through which raced a turgid stream; at both ends of the bridge there were palms and heavy jungle growth. Of a sudden came a rush of soldiers, Germans from one side, British from the other, to the center of the bridge. Both forces were accoutred in uniforms for tropical wear, with white pith helmets. The German force vanished as abruptly as it had appeared; the British had prevailed and held the bridge. One unfortunate German, however, had taken refuge in the superstructure and to him the force of English soldiers now turned their attention, demanding that he come down. Cowed and trembling like a treed rabbit, the man slid down iron timbers to the pack below.

The captive's face was turned toward him and transfixed with horror. "Surely," thought the dreamer, "the punctilious English will be content to take him prisoner and spare his life." As though in answer to this, Cardot was forced to watch while one of the soldiers produced a bayonet and stabbed the German repeatedly in the back. The expression of the face changed before his eyes from one of desperate pleading for life to the sardonic grin of death. Then a limp hulk that a moment before had been a sentient being was thrown into the foaming current far below.

He awoke in the throes of this nightmare, induced by the excitement of events of the day before. "Well," he told himself sadly, "after all, that's just a close-up of modern warfare. Hun or English, they can't seem to get the necessity of applying the Golden Rule—of meting out justice, or exercising the principles of humanity toward other nationals that they feel they should use toward their own people."

He related the dream to Peggy, concluding that after all was said and done a man was entitled to his own private views on warfare, and that there was something to be conceded to the conscientious objector who had the courage of his convictions and lived up to them. That evening he wrote to the Chief of the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps for details of enlistment and training as a flyer.

VII

It was a rainy Thursday; all during the preceding day the dark clouds had been mobilizing, first in facile squads and companies, and then in slow-moving regiments. The locusts that had been chirping contentedly shrilled vain protest against this menace to their comfort, but otherwise, drooping nature beckoned the welcome relief. In the night the wind had risen while the rain came in noisy torrents that beat cosily on the roof.

When the gray daylight came it was still pouring steadily. Mr. Childers had gone out after breakfast, more through force of habit than anything else, though he also counted it a privilege to outfit himself in slicker and top-boots and ride forth with the rain beating in his face.

Cardot, who had received notification to report at the training school, was assuming in advance the prerogatives of the soldier on leave and slept late. Peggy served him breakfast herself—thin triangles of buttered toast and coffee that was a steaming libation to Jupiter Pluvius.

"Suppose I stay home today, Peggy," he suggested, appreciatively, as she brought him the second cup.

"Oh, fine!" she exclaimed, delighted. "Please do. We can finish 'Mr. Britling' and have time to talk as well. I love gloomy days."

"They don't seem gloomy down here," he answered. "There is so much sunshine that they are rarer than a day in June."

The testament of "Matching's Easy" proved de-

pressing and they soon abandoned it to watch in silence the great tears of rain coursing down the oak just outside one window, or the spray flicked from the slender bamboo leaves at the other. Never had each so desired to give spontaneous utterance to his thoughts, and never had either been so self-conscious. Their crowded hour was going to be a failure. Cardot was serious; had been so since he had received his orders. He could conceive no reason for being blithe and carefree, although he had been affecting such a manner.

He had been longing to confide his tender sentiments to Consuela, but now found himself hesitating. He wondered if it was because the War had made sterner stuff of him; whether it was that alone, for all over the country young men were hastening to tell those they loved the things they had left unsaid. The contagion of protective fervor, such as men felt for their wives and sweethearts wherever there were imminent perils, had not reached him. Consuela, hidden away in the calm woods with her father, would be safe enough; the shores of the United States would not be invaded. But he knew at the same time that he could easily work himself into any kind of transport that he desired. It was merely a matter of releasing the brakes on his imagination and permitting it to run downhill; the matter of stopping it would be another thing.

This phase of his make-up worried him. For Consuela he had the most unstinted admiration and with it a vast amount of affection; he was vibrant at her merest touch. When he mentally compared her with other women he had known, she held every perfection. She had responded to his enthusiasms and fancies and her cool, rich

voice, always fringed with mirth, gave him a deep, joyous satisfaction. Yes, he concluded, it was love, according to all the known standards.

He felt certain that if he and Consuela were married, or even engaged, the thought of her would be a sanctuary and a place of refuge in many a despondent hour. And yet he had not broached the subject to her. He generously argued with himself that he was unworthy, and permitted the inhibition of that thought to stand as an excuse for his silence.

The rain ceased and was succeeded by a desultory blowing of the wind, which spasmodically shook the heavy drops from the oak tree. Through a ragged edge of cloud, with ever-changing tentacles, the sun shone for an instant, like a wan smile. Cardot walked absently to the window and looked out.

"I think the rain is over for the day," he said.

"I'm not so sure," replied Consuela from the divan. "They say that only a fool and a stranger will predict weather in Florida."

"And I suppose I am both," said Cardot with an air of injury.

"You poor dear," she answered, with a note of compassionate apology that curled into his heart, "you know I didn't mean that as personal."

There was in that tone an indefinable agency that seemed to open the flood-gates of his emotions, the plaint of desire reverberating faintly in the mysterious valleys of the soul. He sat down beside her with a new and consuming interest surging within him. He had not guessed before that she had cared for him in this way; it was as though a new light were turned on the world. She had shrunk on previous occasions from his affectionate advances and he had quickly

desisted, cursing himself as an ingrate; now he put his arms about her and drew her unyieldingly to him. He was unprepared for the capitulation that followed. She flung her arms impulsively about his neck, her eyes full of tears.

"Oh, Jules," she cried, "are you blind? Can't you see I love you?"

"And I love you, sweetheart," he answered consolingly, though disappointed at the perfunctory sound of his own voice.

"No, no, you don't!" she declared, with an effort to control her weeping. "It's only a passing fancy with you."

He denied this vehemently and kissed her tear-damped lips. With her head on his shoulder she shook convulsively with sobs, while he breathed the fragrance of her hair and marvelled at the suddenness of it all. And within him, it seemed, a pæan of triumph was beating with hallelujahs and the dim clash of cymbals.

Consuela became calmer, sat up and dried her eyes. "I didn't know I was such a cry-baby," she said, looking at him abashed. "It must not have been very pleasant to kiss me."

"We'll try it all over again," he offered.

"Not now," she protested and held herself aloof.

"I insist," he said, with a thrill of ownership. He drew her to him and kissed her less ardently.

"And now," he asked, with a feeling that he was making a step into water far beyond his depth, "what is to be our status? Are we to consider ourselves engaged?"

"If you wish it so," she consented, and then, in a more confident tone, "we'll tell father as soon as he comes."

The next morning Jules was up early, with a

song in his heart to match that of the mocking-bird who had been beguiling the night in the old oak tree and was still rehearsing his varied repertoire in a chain of silvery notes. At one stage in his song the feathered Lothario distinctly approximated the name Consuela, repeating it several times and then pausing for appreciation before passing to another strain. Cardot lingered in his bedroom in pleasant expectation until this part of the roundelay was over, and then went below and sat on the porch on which the sun was just beginning its tour of duty.

Here he recounted the many things for which he had to be thankful: above all things, the Lord had sent him a beautiful, high-spirited girl, one of the old school who retained all her feminine charm and was at the same time a personality. What had he done to deserve such an act of grace?

Then, more seriously, he thought of what he should do in the immediate future. Should he dissolve all doubts by asking Peggy to marry him at once? He knew it would be best, but the fact that he had no money disturbed him. No doubt, he reasoned, she would accede and continue to live with her father until he had returned and was rehabilitated, but the vulgar aspect of a war marriage, leaving his wife dependent on her parent, did not appeal to him. He sat turning the matter over in his mind, finding still other objections—which proved the truth of Rosalind's observation that "men are April when they woo; December when they wed." At length he heard his beloved descending the stairs and with relief went within to greet her.

VIII

"There's but the twinkling of a star between a man of peace and the man of war," and Cardot, with strange suddenness, found himself at a ground school of military aeronautics, established at a western university, working with heart-breaking intensity to master the various branches of this science. The would-be military aviator must be a competent wireless operator, must understand the various standard airplane engines; must know the theory of flight, and later its practice; must be able to repair his machine; must learn the nomenclature of all these things. Then there were two of the standard machine guns used on airplanes at the time, the Lewis and the Vickers, in the use of which hours of instruction were given daily; there was map-reading, a smattering of navigation and the use of airplane instruments. In addition to this, he must learn to drill, must become acquainted with the regulations and paper work essential to the daily life and conduct of a commissioned officer.

These were all given in the form of lectures, on which the cadet student was expected to take copious notes. This amount of work was staggering, but as if it were not already enough, there were long hours of drilling and instruction in the school of the soldier, of infantry drill regulations. Finally, there were weekly examinations which murdered sleep the night before.

The fledgling airmen were well quartered in a newly-finished women's dormitory, which a whimsy of the War had converted into a soldiers'

barracks. Large plate glass mirrors surprised one at the stair landing; there were cozy nooks meant for giggling girls clustered about bonbons; there were capacious wardrobes designed for feminine skirts and scented fineries, which were now filled with khaki suits and the rough clothes and accoutrements of the soldier. They were also well fed and looked after.

"We may as well tell you," said one of the instructors, "that you are regarded as the prize cattle of the army and are treated accordingly."

Cardot found his comrades-in-arms much younger than himself. The lesson of the War in Europe, of which the United States was receiving the full benefit, taught that men of extreme youth, from eighteen to twenty-one or two, made the best aviators, as indeed the younger men made the best fighters in all branches; for it is the cruel irony of modern warfare that the flower of the manhood and the hope of the generation shall pay the penalty. Since a main desideratum in the choice of an aviator is recklessness, the caution of the average man even of thirty being fatal, the outside age limit was placed at thirty-five. No longer a youth, the Latin impulsiveness of Cardot was a saving quality.

Many of the close friends he made were still in the heyday of nonage, such as Gray, callow, romantic and desperately in love with the girl he had left behind.

The mail was the thing! It was generally distributed just before the noon meal and saved by the men for their choicest dessert of desserts, and many there were also who forgot their sharpened appetites and overlooked the "seconds," in eager reading of messages from those for whom they were winning their wings.

Consuela wrote daily, as she had promised, which was oftener than Jules could possibly answer. "My boy is so busy that he cannot find time to write," she would complain in her letters. "Forgive him? Of course—how could I do otherwise? But please, dearest, let me know everything you are doing. Let me know of all your pleasures, all about your work, for I like to follow you in thought, even though I can't be with you in reality."

And again: "Your letters are my only happiness. When I didn't receive one yesterday, I was wretched. Dear, I get so lonesome for you that sometimes I think I must come to you. I love you better every day, even if Dad did tell me this morning (in a joke) that absence doesn't always make the heart grow fonder. . . ."

She was planning to become a nurse. She wanted to go to New York and then across, but her father needed her at home as his housekeeper. She would have to do some dark plotting, she said, in order to make her getaway.

To Cardot these letters were stimulating and he missed them and was vaguely unhappy on the several occasions when their daily regularity was interrupted. But he was unconsciously undergoing a change; he was being hardened mentally as well as physically. The stern business of preparing for war over the lines was commandeering all his resources and attention. Deadly efficiency must be met with efficiency of the same mettle; the devil must be fought with fire. He felt that he could let those on the outside do the flag-waving, sentimentalizing and Kaiser-kussing; discipline and intimate knowledge of his weapons are the qualities that go to make the soldier. And so in time love and his engagement to Con-

suela became a memory as much as anything else, something to be held in abeyance for the time being and resumed when conditions should again permit.

Yet he had never felt better satisfied with himself; at last he was of some use to the world. Hard work and the patriotic zeal which occasionally flashed over him had chastened his mind. The issue of the War was obscured; he held no rancour for the enemy. The privilege of serving America and France was sufficient inducement for expending his last drop of blood. He could ask no greater boon.

. . . . . .

The airplanes from a field close by flew over the university and the cadets waved envious and admiring handkerchiefs. Their sole ambition was to get off the ground and into the air, and time dragged monotonously. Weeks were months and months were years, but eventually they were transferred to flying fields, experienced the bliss of first flight and in course of time were allowed to make solo trials. Then, day of days, they were presented with their commissions and allowed to wear the seductive silver wings over the right breast.

IX

After months of gruelling training Cardot found himself detached from his squadron, awaiting orders in New York City with a plethora of time on his hands. In sharp contrast to his daily grind at Ground School, he now had no duties whatsoever, except to wait and hold himself in readiness. He did not know the reason; few did know the whys of things in those days. There had been a mix-up in the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps, of which the present Flying Corps was then a branch, and the airplane program was delayed.

At first he threw himself wholeheartedly into the maelstrom of social activities and the attentions which war-time New York was lavishing on officers passing through or stationed in the city. Here were the finest facilities for amusement that the world could offer. Nightly there were brilliant balls at the leading hotels and clubs. At the Pershing Club for officers there were dances every night; there were free threatre and concert tickets, and a canteen presided over by a corps of society women, who found the occupation of serving attentive officers so pleasant that they were loath to return to prosaic home life.

Cardot enjoyed the first four or five days of his new liberty; it was such a vivid relief from the discipline to which he had been accustomed that he had no idea such a life could ever pall on him. But after the first week this honeymoon of freedom had passed. After all, the War was raging and he longed to get into it, to be of real

service; he did not care to be forgotten and left to fight the "Battle of Broadway."

The sense of continually waiting for orders left him singularly restless. He had more time to write letters and he wrote to Consuela, expressing the ardent wish that she should come north but fearing that, since there was the uncertainty of orders, by the time she could arrive in New York he might perhaps be on his way somewhere else. Secretly, however, he did not care to attach himself to any one woman. He preferred variety, new faces and the froth of life; it seemed better to suit his mental attitude. But at the same time he put no one above Consuela in his mind. She was one of the points of delicious fixity in this whirling bedlam; she was like a waiting mother, to whom he would return like a tired child after the toys were broken and all was over. She, too, was a point of honor with him. It was his first engagement and he attached almost as much solemnity to it as to marriage itself; he would not violate his pledge of troth to her even in thought.

A week passed, two weeks, three weeks, and still no orders. Had his been one of those intense natures that appreciate the value of time, he could have turned his thoughts to account. He did do some desultory reading, he visited the museums, and he conversed with other officers; always they seemed to be catching trains or boats, with only a glorious few minutes to spare in the metropolis, and their departure made him feel only more purposeless and more hopelessly marooned, caught and held in this swirling eddy of New York.

One afternoon he casually strolled through the lobby of a large hotel. There was the usual coterie of well-dressed men and women, most of

them wearing a look of profound ennui. It seemed to be the fashionable thing to assume this air of genteel boredom immediately upon entering any of the great downtown hotels. Cardot's eyes passed from well-dressed dowagers with carefully marcelled white hair and delicately tinted faces, to svelte younger women, with no less studied toilettes, lace hosiery and immaculate footwear; then to the men, for whom fashion prescribed a garb almost uniform of spats, pencil-striped trousers and cut-away coats. As he glanced down the row of creaseless shoes, with the dull staring lace holes or formal bows, Cardot wondered whether they, too, were not correctly bored.

Several American army officers in fresh uniforms and faultless, bespurred boots, and a British officer, more at ease in a costume of a less severe cut, formed part of the fixed wall decorations, but other military men came and went purposefully. Some of these had the joy of leave-of-absence irradiating their faces, while others discarded any air of frivolity as soon as the rotating door had discharged them and resumed the sternness they had abandoned upon leaving their duties.

Cardot had been sitting there possibly half an hour when a lady entered and took the high-backed chair opposite him, at whose brocaded pattern he had been fixedly staring. She thus became his vis-à-vis, but it was not necessarily on this account that he was immediately attracted. It was the serenity and seraphic purity of her face, her apparent ingenuousness, in contrast with the hard, glittering sophistication of the others, that first engaged his attention. She was some years older than he—possibily in her late thirties.

Thin strands of grey streaked the smooth, black hair, but he had always secretly placed the maturer charms of the middle-aged woman above the callow attractions of the average girl. She had none of the trivialities of the young woman, none of the dash or verve, or dare-you-to challenge which takes cowardly refuge in indignation or flight when accepted.

Cardot regarded her with the reverence that he would pay to a saint. He had a vehement longing to meet her and learn something of her previous history; he was aware of a pure and Platonic affection. He must meet her. He felt this was the part of destiny.

"The one woman I have always longed to know," he thought, availing himself of the opportunity to make a mental inventory. "She is first and foremost 'understanding'; next, she is educated, cultured, refined and married. There is nothing suggestive of the spinster about her. Fortunate man—her husband—to possess such a wealth of goodness!"

He was not, however, in his fervent admiration, guilty of a violation of the Tenth Commandment. She was the friend to whom he could confide his love for Consuela and his hopes for the future after the War; she would listen with interest, offer him advice or sympathy, laugh at his boyishness and ask nothing in return. With such a woman a devoted friendship would be possible, even though she were married, without impinging on the conscience of either.

To Cardot all saints must be beautiful in order to reflect the beatific character within; ugliness to him was sinful. And the lady was exquisite. Her head was erect, with a hint of defiance, her eyes dark brown, soft and velvety, the texture of

her skin fine and smooth. She was not young, being of that type that never seems to have known youth, yet her looks did not speak of the past.

She was apparently expecting a companion for she looked toward the passage leading to the street, contemplating Cardot for a fleeting, and for him a rapt, moment and then resumed her air of sweet patience, almost sadness.

In harmony with all the qualities with which Cardot in his imagination endowed her, was her attire, consisting of a simple but beautifully tailored serge suit of midnight blue. Her tricorne velvet hat was set at just the right angle to suit the contour of her face. To complete a man's summary, her hosiery was of sheer silk and encased in patent leather slippers with French heels—even a saint may have well-turned ankles.

Presently her friend appeared, a large, plump woman, albeit with a certain gymnastic freshness about her and a jolly devil-may-care attitude. Her light brown hair seemed to be drawn tightly upward and concentrated under a jaunty flowered toque, emphasizing large pearl earrings. "Undoubtedly a good fellow," summarized Cardot. "What a vivid contrast!"

He did not speculate long; the ladies exchanged a few words and started for the elevator and with a guilty sense of following, disguise the act as best he could, he managed to reach the elevator door and ascend with them.

"I am in luck," Cardot thrilled triumphantly as the car reached the top floor and discharged its passengers. This was the solarium where a reception and the dansant for officers of the Allied Nations was in progress. He knew that for the man in uniform the matter of being presented to

any guest present was an easy matter; in fact, that formality was waived in many cases. But Cardot preferred the correct introduction; it would make him feel more at ease.

And so the hostess conducted him a few minutes later to the palm-shaded divan where the two women had seated themselves.

"Mrs. Claiborne," addressing his saint of the lobby, "this is Lieutenant Cardot; Mrs. Wheaton, Lieutenant Cardot."

"I am pleased to meet you, I am sure," said Cardot, bowing stiffly. The ladies bowed and murmured their pleasure.

"And now," urged his conductress, "there are some pretty girls over here, I should like you to meet." She led him to a bevy of young things, banded together in a corner with the unspoken determination to giggle down their disappointment at not having dancing partners. The afternoon was young, and while at the height of these affairs the ratio of women to men was always two to one, it was now still greater. The small talk was constrained and awkward, each of the maidens planning how she could best corral the winged lieutenant when the music should start.

Later, while dancing, he noticed that Mrs. Claiborne was sitting alone and as soon as there was a pause in the music he excused himself from his partner and went over to her.

"May I not have the pleasure of a dance?" he asked her. She smiled and shook her head and being easily discouraged he felt that their acquaintanceship was going to end at that, but she stopped him as he was about to bow and leave.

"Won't you sit and talk to me a little?" she asked, moving over the slightest mite.

"I would much prefer it to dancing," he answered sincerely.

"I never learned to dance," she continued, "although I never disapproved, and always wanted to learn. My father was very strict."

"Then you, yourself, are not a Puritan?" he asked, eager to discover the secrets of life of this woman who so appealed to him.

"No, I am not," she said, but added seriously, "sometimes I think it would be much better if I were. I have it my blood and the traditions of my family, but I have always felt such an independence of spirit that I have rebelled against conventions. I used to chafe, even as a girl, under the thought that I was being governed from the grave of my ancestors. But that is the way of the world, I suppose," she smiled, fearing that he might think her moody. "The dead command and the living obey."

He was enchanted by the gentleness of her voice, with its refined modulations, and the trace of anxiety with which he fancied she regarded him. He on his part studied to improve the shining hour, wondering if they would meet again, contemplating the boon of her friendship and radiant influence in his restless hours of unemployment. He had a great desire to be decent; she would help him. He pleaded his loneliness.

"You are a funny boy," she told him, mildly chiding. "I can hardly conceive of an army officer being lonely in New York City in these times when there are so many opportunities for enjoyment. Where are all the girls I see everywhere?"

"I suppose I am funny," he confessed with a touch of wistfulness, "but I happen to be engaged to one of the dearest girls in the world. I am a little old-fashioned myself."

"But would you necessarily have to forget her?" she asked.

"No, I do not think I should," he admitted after reflection, "although I never make it a practice to promise anything in regard to myself. I have found it futile, 'for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.'"

"Paul was right, wasn't he? But I am sure I do not know what to suggest. Where are your books? They are the best companions for lonely hours. They have been a great joy to me!"

He sensed the response of solitary soul to solitary soul. She, too, had been lonely. Could it be the deep solitude of one who had loved in vain? As to the companionship of books, he answered somewhat impatiently:

"I haven't been able to read two lines consecutively. All literature seems so tame, and I am too restless to allow myself to become interested. It is the War, of course; everything is chargeable to that. We blame it for every dereliction, every peccadillo, even of human nature. It seems to me that all the forces of evil are loosed. The spectacle of nations which cherished the highest ideals now maniac with blood-lust is too much for my imagination. I must get into it, help to put an end to it, before I can be contented." The crescendo of his voice betrayed his eagerness.

"I understand," she said soothingly, "but you are doing all you can. 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'"

"There is some consolation in that, but waiting gets terribly on my nerves."

She regarded him seriously. "I should be happy to do anything I can in my small way. I should be glad to have you call on me some evening, if you think that would help."

"Of course, you are married?" he asked, hoping against hope that she was not, but vibrant with joy at her invitation. "Every woman to whom I am attracted is either engaged or married."

"Yes, I am," she answered, "but my husband is away in Oregon on a mission that will detain him several months. He is a supervising engineer on a gigantic dam under construction out there."

"And he wouldn't object?"

"Not at all," she said frankly. "He has always said that he doesn't wish me to become lonesome."

"In which event, I shall be happy to avail myself of your invitation. Will tomorrow evening be too soon?"

"No," she said, "I shall expect you."

At this moment her companion returned and announced that they must be leaving. "I hope I haven't interrupted a tête-à-tête," she added archly.

"Mrs. Claiborne and I have had a most pleasant conversation," said Cardot rising.

X

There are a group of red brick buildings on Gramercy Square which still stand out as a stronghold of respectability in New York City. Their rectangular, staring windows seem to sniff disdainfully at the encroachments of the sky-scrapers with their easy grace and tolerance. Through the indomitable will of their tenants, who appear to have inherited the pride of their predecessors, or ancestors, as the case may be, these buildings have become old without becoming disreputable. They have been painted and repainted, and the white lines of mortar are traced so vividly between the bricks that one is reminded of the canvas street scenes of the theatres, an impression heightened by the lack of traffic and the aristocratic stillness of the square as compared with the roar of Broadway, not far off.

In one of these houses Julia Douglass was born. Her mother died soon after and her early training devolved on her father and his maiden sister, a severe woman with deep, religious convictions. Although brought up in New York, her education partook of an almost nun-like exclusion from the actual facts of life, the reality of which came only faintly to her, much as the rumble of the city which floated in occasionally through the mauve velvet curtains. She was later sent to an exclusive school for young women, an institution conducted by two dignifed spinsters, no less severe than her aunt, who devoted themselves with fervor and stern rigor to the inculcating of

ladylike qualities, giving far more attention to the branch of their curriculum known as "deportment" than they gave to any other subject.

As the girl grew older she chafed more and more under the restraint of home, but she could never summon courage to voice her discontent. Her father was as human as his crust of reserve would permit, but he always managed to reason his daughter out of her girlish whimsies. Thrown back upon herself she was always reading romances, love stories, a great deal of poetry, occasional easy scientific subjects, and thus vicariously learning of the world and coloring it with the rosy, poetical light of her own imagination.

When she had completed her boarding-school education, her father, whose business required that he should travel, took her with him. Thus she saw the United States and Canada from one end to the other, and much of Europe. On these trips she was happy and contented. Her father was her constant companion. Though she met many interesting men and women they, too, were usually much older than she and she consequently assumed a mature air rather out of keeping with her years.

Having abandoned in turn an ambition, born of her romantic nature, first for the stage, and later for the Bohemian life of an artist in a Greenwich Village attic, she looked forward to marriage as the inevitable career open to her. She pictured it as an ideal state, a Utopian existence wherein she would be perpetually happy.

And then Frederic Claiborne came into her life. He was a close friend and business associate of her father, who admired him greatly for his ambitions and high moral standards. He was, in fact, a man to command the respect of all with

whom he came in contact. He was a physical giant, tall and well-proportioned; chivalrous in his manner and engrossed in his work.

The father brought him often to Gramercy Square, seeing in him the prospects of an ideal son-in-law, and eventually Claiborne asked leave to pay his addresses to Julia. Claiborne, though much older, was the epitome of manly virtues. His dictum was law to her; he was perfect.

It was true he was not the languishing lover of whom she had read in her novels and poems. Sentiment had very little place in his make-up, but while she missed this, she was confident that there was some miraculous, magical power in marriage that would overcome any defect. He would become then the indulgent, tender husband and theirs would be an exemplary existence. Marriage to her was a sacrament, enshrined in her heart during all her girlhood days; it was almost wicked to think of it as being anything but happy.

She was therefore little prepared for the cruel delusions of life by the side of a man to whom a business career meant everything, and marriage only a means to that end. He was courteous and cold, treating her little woman's ways, in which her hunger for love manifested itself, as mere weakness. He was absolutely ignorant of feminine nature, taking for granted that as the wife of Frederic Claiborne, provided with all the comforts and luxuries of life, she must certainly be happy. It never occurred to him that there was nothing in wealth to satisfy the little unsatisfied demands of her heart.

She did her part and more. She poured her love in libations, which fell only on barren soil; he repulsed her advances, not unkindly or un-

gently, but indulgently, as though she were a naughty child. Her woman's soul was outraged, but she did not give up her hopes of winning him, of making apparent to him the bleakness to which he was condemning her, until she became convinced that she was wedded to a cold, reasoning machine and that every sacrifice would be in vain.

Claiborne was ambitious to an extent that terrified her; his ambition swept away all obstacles before it. Shortly after they were married, he told his wife that they must not have children. He could not be so hampered until he had made further progress in his profession. This was her great chilling disappointment, but, as in other instances, she had to submit quietly to this edict, to his selfishness. Later, when the mothering instinct and all the traditions of her birth and training grew too strong within her to be repressed, she begged and pleaded with him to grant as a boon that which was her woman's right and heritage.

Night after night now she lay in her own room, tense with passion and unrequited affection, and the morning still found her sleepless. Thus she came to consider her status as a pseudo-wife, a concubine in his household. She wondered if, after all, she did not have a touch of scarlet in her, to be able to remain with him. But the generations before her frowned her down.

At times she hated him with a deadly hatred and rebellion seethed within her. She had lavished her affections until she thought the well was dry, but she found her love trickling in to replenish it, fed by an apparently inexhaustible spring of desire.

His profession began to call him away from home a great deal and she came to regard these

absences as blessed respites from the weariness of the conflict which raged within her. Solitude held a charm that it has for most tortured souls. Her spiritual wounds were somewhat assuaged, and the privacy and stillness of the apartment on the Drive were as a pleasant oasis to the desert traveler.

And yet the Calibornes were pointed out as a happily married couple. Julia, on her part, was above gossiping about her husband, and he, too blinded with ambition and conceit to realize the extent of suffering he was causing.

The death of her father four years after her marriage caused her infinite sadness. As long as he was living, she had a home to which she could turn, where she could live again her childhood days. She had some one, at least, to pet and humor her as in the past, but with his death this refuge was denied her.

XI

Calling the following afternoon at Mrs. Claiborne's apartment, Cardot experienced the pleasant sensation of a tryst as he waited for the elevator which would carry him to her floor. He was in a happy frame of mind; there were restraints on both sides which would make their friendship such as angels smile upon. He had just received a letter from Consuela relating the little happenings of her day. She was in Atlanta studying to become a trained nurse. "I am not so far from you now, dear," she wrote. "Perhaps I may even see you before you leave, but that is almost too much to hope for. Don't neglect or forget me, for I am always thinking and longing for you, though working heartbreakingly hard." By way of postscript, she enclosed a sweet shrub: "It will die," she said, "but it has the odor of the South." The unadorned vertical handwriting, bespeaking sincerity and honesty of heart, brought her vividly before him; the memory of the rainy day was a mental lozenge which perpetually retained its pleasing flavor of romantic youthful attachment.

As to the attraction which Mrs. Claiborne had for him, his ready self-justification came to his aid.

"The more I see of the others," he told himself, "the more I will appreciate Consuela . . . the comparison is absurd, anyway."

He stood before her door with quick-beating heart, hearing from within the soft notes of a piano. The music left off at his knock and was

succeeded by a gentle swish of approaching skirts.

"Good afternoon, Lieutenant Cardot," she greeted easily. "You found the way without any trouble?"

"Yes, indeed," he answered. "New York City is the oyster that I have opened with my sword."

She laughed softly as she led the way to the library. The aviator stared at her with incredulity This was a different woman from the one he had met before; the laughter of the saints could have no such musical ring. Today she was deliciously human in pearl grey crepe-de-chine; her abundant hair piled loosely into a sort of psyche, with what appeared to be studied negligence.

Today, too, she was arch and challenging, while he was determined to maintain the attitude of respect with which she had previously inspired him. She asked him about his home life, his ambitions, his travels. She wanted to know all his love affairs; she was particularly interested in his penchant for literature and delighted with his philosophical turn of mind.

She told him of her travels, first with her father and then with her husband, to whom she always referred as "Mr. Claiborne."

"But a woman can never have the fun that a man has in traveling. A man can go anywhere, at any time, and with whom he pleases, while a woman has to trail along. I have often wanted to taste real independence," she pouted.

Cardot had to admit she was right; he had never seen any advantage in being a woman.

"It isn't written that a woman can have all the experiences that a man may," he said. "That is, have them and keep feminine."

"I don't know why she shouldn't," she returned

with a little toss of her head. "Are men such superior beings that they should sip every pleasure, while women must remain household drudges? That era has passed."

"I am quite sure it has," agreed Cardot heartily. "The War has shown that women can do the work of men; they are entering fields that have been closed to them for centuries, they are feeling the freedom of manumitted slaves, since most women choose to look on their former state as a species of slavery, but if they interpret this freedom as license, God help us!"

"You are quite an orator, aren't you?" she interrupted the discussion with a smile."

"That's what my mother always told me," he said laughing. "Isn't it strange that today we are discussing these things like old friends and yesterday, when I first saw you, I thought you as distant and unapproachable as a star? I don't mean cold or unfriendly," he hastened to add. He became confused, so she came to his assistance.

"I suppose you put me on a pedestal, and today I have stepped off."

"Oh, no, I didn't quite mean that," he protested, and he did not because he was still worshipping more ardently than ever.

"I know you didn't," she said gently. "You are a dear boy to have such an exalted opinion of me, but I am really very human. Most women don't care to be thought little plaster saints. And now," she continued, rising, "let us see what we can get together for tea."

"That sounds interesting," he murmured contentedly, as she left him alone to contemplate the formidable array of books in oak cases which lined the room.

She returned with a tea cloth.

"Those are my husband's books," she answered in response to the sweep of his eye. "I love to read and sometimes I do some wading, but I'd rather avoid anything too deep. I love poetry; I'm afraid I even read the Bible poetically."

"I have never read it otherwise," he said, "but then I am a free-thinker or a nothing, I suppose." He would have said atheist, but there always seemed to be some mental objection to the pronouncing of that word, born of early superstition that something terrible might happen to him if he applied it to himself.

"You know you're not," she chided mildly, adjusting the cloth with a quiet precision. "Somehow or other I formed the opinion that you were very devout, or that you had it in you to be so."

"That is an odd conclusion; I guess after all it is impossible to size one up from his appearance. But really," he persisted, "don't you think that religion has been rather a failure? After centuries of civilization, look where we find ourselves!"

She had kept her eyes on him, and her voice was grave. She talked to him as she would to a little boy.

"I know. It has been a time to try one's faith, but God, in His mysterious way, is present on every battlefield, both over there, and here on those on which we fight our own battles. And there, as here, in the darkest hours, real help is in the Bible."

"And yet," said Cardot, as though in a reverie, "there is something fine about war, especially for the man actively engaged in it, even if he is only waiting for orders. Personally I wouldn't today trade places with the most affluent war-profiteer on earth, with his hand lusting for all

that is not his own. War for a noble principle ennobles one; develops that most precious heritage of a man—his honor. It has in this case furnished us the spectacle of all classes, rich and poor, high, low and middle caste, even criminal, banded together in a common cause. What a democracy! It is too bad religion cannot be as all-embracing; there have been enough sacrifices, cruel practices and bloodshed in its name to make it so, but we see it today still broken up into sects, with their diverse creeds, all worshipping the same God, or His equivalent, but still bickering, quarreling, intolerant."

He saw that she was not convinced. She had paused in her preparations and was waiting for him to complete his peroration.

"My dear," he was drawn by the compassion in her voice, "it is a shame that such a young man as yourself should be so cynical. I see I shall have to take you in hand. I am not one of those who invest the God of Love with a thirst for the blood of those who do not know Him as I do, or worship Him by another name, but please do not try to tell me that war, with its murder, pillage and destruction, is beautiful, or has any place in our civilization. And now," she concluded more lightly, as she turned to pour the tea, "draw up your chair. You will have to make out on one lump of sugar, as we humble civilians do."

"This isn't tea; this is nectar!" exclaimed Cardot appreciatively.

The evening shadows gathered as they talked and the rumble of the noisy city seemed to become less harsh, but more insistent.

"Will you send me home after tea, or would you consider an invitation to the theatre?" he

asked hesitatingly, fearing that he was wearing out his welcome.

"I should love it," she answered with a half-amused smile.

XII

There was an epidemic of "bedroom" plays, plays glorifying the eternal triangle, ribald plays in which normal marriage was *reductio ad absurdum.* Plays depicting war were almost taboo; people were fed up on that subject. They selected finally a new production which they took on faith. It proved to be an exhibition of the skill of a veneered savage in evening clothes in making love to women he deemed worthy of his mettle, purely for the sake of the conquest, and in successfully breaking down their barrier of reserve. The stage was literally strewn with his victims though he had selected for his consumption only those who were like Caesar's wife, scornfully delegating the others to his less fastidious partner in crime. The play left a bad taste in Cardot's mouth. He still carried the idealism of love, of the pure, holy respect and affection between man and woman. He felt there must be truth at the bottom of it, and that man must jealously guard his ideals of woman as the moat between real manhood and barbarity; he was convinced that, as the river can rise no higher than its source, so to cheapen the dignity of womanhood or sully the honor of the sex, was to lower the standards of civilization.

They did not discuss the merits of the play as they joined the slow-moving throng of theatregoers headed toward Broadway, beyond agreeing that they did not care for it.

They rode home on the hurricane deck of a Fifth Avenue bus, and he held unnecessarily long

to the beautifully moulded arm by which he had assisted her to her seat. She recognized the innocence of it and did not give that slight signal of resistance which to him would have been a command. She, too, was in rapport with this mood of worshipping affection which filled his eyes with the vague rapture of one who discovers new marvels in the universe.

"I hope you will want to come soon again," she said as she left him at the elevator.

"You must recall that I have a lecture on the ethics of cynicism coming to me," he laughed.

"Very well, sir," she answered spiritedly. "You shall have it. I fear, though, you are like the mermaid who said she couldn't swim, but was willing to be taught."

He laughed and made his adieux. He walked briskly and elastically toward town, his eyes sparkling. If he had been in civilian clothes he would have whistled, but his uniform was an ever-present symbol of the dignity with which he was taught an officer should comport himself. Nevertheless he was unconsciously betraying the physiological symptoms of a new love, something which he would have emphatically denied if any one had accused him. The human family have more than one way of loving, just as birds have different recepts or methods of landing, according to whether they alight in the trees, on the ground, or, if sea birds, on serene or turbulent water. We love with our senses, our hearts or our imaginations; one emotion may be genuine as the other, and often in the cross-currents of our beings these mysterious streams run counter, or run together and are merged into one.

To Cardot Mrs. Claiborne was still the radiant goddess that he had enthroned in his imagina-

tion on the first day he had seen her, but her very humanness on this afternoon had been the subtle agency whereby a very human love had been stimulated and was now merged into the current of worship and deification.

The heart takes many ways, devises many means, argues and metaphorically tosses many heads-and-tails to show its contempt for human judgment, in order to arrive at what it wants. It ends by rejecting the unfavorable tails and tossing on until the coins have given their consent, however reluctantly. And so Cardot followed his natural bent. He did not want to bring into his attachment a lover's ardor, and there was in him a niche in which stood the ideal of sanctity of marriage. He would keep it inviolate.

He reasoned that she was different from others. She had that wonderful God-given equilibrium, that balance between intellect, culture, and inherent religion on the one side and the craving for affection on the other, which would temper the strong wine of infatuation. He did not wish to fall in love; that was the antithesis of his desires. He had set out early in life with a high moral determination to conquer his appetites and passions, but he had many times to admit that it was a losing fight, and he did not trust himself; although he dreaded to admit it, yet in his inner consciousness he knew that the average strong attraction between man and woman is sexual in its origin, and though it may be beautiful yet it partakes of the earth. Here he had a glimpse of a friendship altogether holy, one in which the animal within him might be completely subjugated. He wondered.

Two days passed to whet his impatience before he called Mrs. Claiborne on the telephone. She

was busy with Red Cross work, but he might meet her at the Knickerbocker at four; then they could talk of plans for the balance of the day. He caught at the suggestion with eagerness. In the afternoon he started out from his room, planning to reach the hotel with ten minutes to spare. He had consulted his watch a hundred times and he found on gaining the lobby that he was fully half an hour ahead of his appointment. He sank into a corpulent leather chair and watched the coming and going of people, the meetings, handshakes and gay conversations, the brisk hospitality of the clerks, mentally comparing these brief contacts and partings to the touching of antennae of busy ants.

Before he was aware of it, Mrs. Claiborne had entered the lobby and was standing beside one of the pillars, awaiting his appearance. A fleeting sense of guilt went over him which he would not have felt for a younger woman, or perhaps for any other woman; a feeling that he was inducing her to go out of the way, to stoop to the indignity of meeting him in a public place. And yet all the other appointments he had witnessed in this social central office that afternoon had appeared innocent and vivacious enough. Perhaps it was something in the forlornness of her attitude. At any rate, she had suggested the meeting-place, but they could have been more discreet. Evidently she was too ingenuous; he would discuss this with her.

Her face brightened as she recognized him coming in her direction.

"Good evening," he said, offering his hand.

"Good afternoon," she corrected, smiling.

"Of course, it's afternoon," he admitted. "We Southerners call it 'evening' after dinner-time;

probably because we don't have the long twilights you have up here."

"Is that the reason?" she asked.

"It must be. But you and I have a whole little eternity here before dark; where shall we spend it?"

"Wherever you wish," she said, regarding him affectionately. "You are 'the stranger within the gates.'"

"Couldn't we take a stroll through the woods, somewhere away from all this crowd and hubbub? Let's go to the wilderness, to Bronx Park! I'm tired of the gritty paving stones."

"Capital! Shall we stop by at the apartment for a book?"

"Anything you like, my dear." He had promised himself to be meticulously careful not to use any endearments, but this one slipped out in his delight at her enthusiasm. She did not appear to notice it, but he silently railed at the sentry of his tongue for allowing it to pass.

Outside, he called a taxi and they spun through the crowded streets and into Riverside. Close at hand a file of grim, battle-grey ships of war sunned themselves placidly in the Hudson.

"Think how peaceful they are in this snug harbor! And tonight they may be ploughing the sea in a gale; lights out, every man alert and keyed to the snapping point with apprehension of danger!" He could not view these indicia of the titanic struggle without a feeling of sadness over his inutility. He consoled himself: some of these days soon he would be bucking, like a canoe in a seaway, the disturbed atmosphere over the battlefields. Soon enough, perhaps; the papers spoke much more hopefully of the air program.

"You won't be happy until you are in it, will you?" she asked, reading his thoughts. "It must be thrilling to fly," she added with girlish fervor.

"It is 'thrilling.' The aviator is the playboy of the War, but it is dangerous and an essential branch—the 'eyes of the army,' you know," he said impressively. "I hope you will believe me when I tell you that I didn't take it up as a sport. It was the arm of the service in which I thought I could be best used. And here I am 'rusting unburnished.' You know those lines of Tennyson's 'Ulysses':

> How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
> To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
> As tho' to breathe were life! Life
> Piled on life
> Were all too little, and of one to me
> Little remains. . . .

"Don't you often feel that way? Aren't you ever overpowered with the thought of the shortness of life, and how little time we have to accomplish anything on this planet?"

"I have felt that way often," she replied, "but more often time has dragged immeasurably on my hands. I have promised and promised myself to do something worthwhile, but the canker has been at my heart. I have worked without hope. . . . But we are not to make complaint the burden of our conversation today, are we? Today is a holiday and 'God's in His Heaven.'"

They had reached her apartment and she stepped down lightly without his help. He watched her supple stride up the walk, speculating on the meaning of her words. Of course, it must be her husband; they were unhappy together and she had too much pride to blame him or unfold her secret misery. Her husband, he

felt, must be a monster to mistreat such a woman, or fail to appreciate her.

She called back from the doorway: "Dismiss the taxi; we will walk over and take the subway." For this suggestion he was grateful. It showed a consideration unknown to the average girl, who, it had been his experience, was avid in her eagerness to have money spent on her, whether it purchased anything or not.

At the park they inspected the Zoo with the interest of children, going from cage to cage, commenting on the curse of restlessness in the felines, pacing the floor of their prisons with unrelenting vigilance, seeking a means of escape. The other animals accepted their captivity more philosophically, some to the point of appearing absolutely contented with their lot. To be born in a zoo was, to use a figure from human life, to be born with a silver spoon in the mouth, but the felines did not appreciate this advantage.

"And how much worse off they would be if they did escape," said Mrs. Claiborne, "with the whole populace raising a hue and cry until they were killed or put back in their cages."

"True," said Cardot, and then upon reflection, "with the exception of the house cat. The domestic tabby is just as wild as any of these. Her domestication is absolutely superficial. You can trust a dog or horse and know just what its reactions will be to kindness or harsh treatment, but the cat accepts civilization on her own terms."

"Why do you say 'her'?" demanded Mrs. Claiborne defensively, "there are male cats, too."

He laughed. "I'm not the only one who puts the cat in the feminine gender. I only know it is a mystery; one of those which Solomon should have included in his list that he 'knew not of.'"

Arm in arm they strolled; past camels, suggesting volumes of Arabian Nights in the very grace of their heads; elephants, rocking to and fro in a sort of antediluvian rite; and in enclosures of greenery, deer, those romantic poems in flesh.

They finally found a secluded spot beside a garrulous brook and sat down with the intention of reading, but the book remained unopened. Instead they talked, touching on random subjects both light and grave. She listened with interest to his discourse on matters scientific or pertaining to the world upheaval, which, with the aid of a retentive memory, he had tagged and pigeonholed in his brain. Knowing his relief in unburdening his thoughts, she asked questions which stimulated him to continue until the subject was exhausted.

Then, not wishing to monopolize the time with his own interests, he asked her questions about herself, and succeeded in arousing a charming enthusiasm in which she recalled incidents in her girlhood days. The musical inflections of her voice, her faultless diction, delighted him.

Her animation ceased when she came to speak of her married life, and though she referred to her husband only in the most respectful and dignified manner, giving no verbal suggestion of unhappiness, Cardot's ready ear detected a jangling note. At first, he could not be sure of this, thinking he had perhaps run across an example of that refinement of marriage in which the literature he had read abounded, wherein husband and wife treat each other courteously and considerately, but hold one another at arm's length, regarding too warm affection as *bourgeois*. With the frank curiosity of the single man for the riddle of conjugal relationship, he questioned her

adroitly until there was no further doubt in his mind of her discontent. In quick and sincere sympathy he reached out and took her soft, white hand in his, caressed it and lifted it lightly to his lips.

Then, as though he had taken too great a liberty, he announced briskly that they must be starting back. He helped her to her feet, and in the lengthening shadows they walked leisurely toward the city. He did not make the effort to maintain conversation, feeling that with this rare companion silence could be a communion.

. . . . . .

It was late at night before he left her. He had kissed her good-night with a chaste, sweetheart kiss and it was not until after he had reached the street that the realization came violently upon him that this friendship which he had so devoutly promised would remain such, had developed into an infatuation. His first instinct was one of alarm, but soon he began to glory in it. Could there be any harm in pure love of man for woman, even though she were married? To admit that there could be evil in it seemed a sacrilege, a desecration of the shrine from which this ethereal affection emanated.

XIII

Cardot could not remember ever having been in such a state before. His attachment, his blind idolatry of Mrs. Claiborne was an obsession, almost an illness. Poor Consuela belonged as much to the past as crinoline and hoop-skirts; she was all but forgotten. His feverish anxiety for the long-delayed orders was absolutely allayed. When he remembered his meals he ate only mechanically and without appetite. His moral sense, stern Puritan at times, was serenely sleeping. When he was not with her, he was drifting in a sort of listlessness, forgetful of everything except that he was in the throes of a violent, reciprocated love.

He was charmed with the intriguing aspect of the affair. His duty to the absent husband, when taken before the bar of his conscience, was easily dismissed with a unanimous *per curiam* decision. Claiborne had been cruel to her, he was not deserving of consideration. Had Cardot known him or broken bread in his house, his high sense of honor would have stiffened his willpower, but now he was carried unresistingly by the strong wind of his affections. He drew additional comfort from the confidence he had in her nobility and the inflexible strength of virtue which he felt irradiating her character. He looked down as though from heights on the petty, sordid loves of others and felt compassion for them. His was a different, more exalted emotion.

He saw her almost daily now. Their companionship lasted generally from the afternoon

hours until late at night. The discretion of an early parting hour never seemed to be present in the mind of either. At first they sought the solitude of Bronx Park, returning to the scene of their first pleasant afternoon there, but it was not long before they began to linger longer in the seclusion of her apartment, in which he had begun to take almost a proprietary interest.

At the beginning he feared that tongues might be set wagging. He would not for worlds have scandal breathed against her. He fancied with indignation that the elevator man had given him a knowing look, as though he were in on an amorous secret. But she was apparently indifferent. He admired this carelessness as a part of her purity, her unsophistication. For his own peace of mind he broached the subject to her one day.

"What will people say?" he asked, using the old formula. "What will they think of my visiting you every day?"

"Nothing at all," she replied blandly. "People all over the city are entertaining soldiers in their homes; why should they think anything of it?"

"But not always under the same conditions, and not always the same soldier," he protested mildly. "However, you know best. I only hope and pray that no harm can come of our friendship."

"Of course, it cannot," she reassured him affectionately. "We will not let it."

He kissed her and they seated themselves on a divan in the library. She drew closer to him and opened the novel she had been reading aloud. He put his arms about her shoulders; kisses and affectionate embraces were now taken as a matter of course.

She looked up into his eyes smilingly and said: "If you are quite comfortable, we will proceed."

But a vague disquietude was growing within him as his visit continued. He was becoming the protector and she, he began to fear, was only waiting for him to adventure further upon the troubled seas of an illicit affair. His infatuation, like other states of high mental excitement, had reached its crisis and was now unconsciously abating and his conscience began to rear itself like the mountain-peak of Ararat above the flood. He had not set out to conquer, but he had unwittingly tempted a lonely heart; the tide of her being was setting in his direction. He was disconcerted and more deeply chagrined than he cared to admit to himself. Flight, precipitate flight, urged his better self, but he answered that it would be unchivalrous; he would taper off the affair. Perhaps he might persuade her to see how much the influence of pure friendship had meant to him, and they would continue on the basis he had first conceived.

The next evening he called again, determined to clarify the atmosphere.

"Dear," he began, scrupulously avoiding a term too endearing, "I am afraid, afraid for you. Something may happen. We must not risk it."

She remained silent and looked at him with a troubled air, a tacit admission that she had weighed the consequences. He seated himself beside her.

"What shall we do about it?" she asked finally.

"We must see less of each other."

Her arms were about his neck in a sudden, passionate embrace. "No, no, lover, not that. Surely you can't mean that you don't care to see me again."

He was startled by her fervor. She was accepting him as her "lover"; there was something shameless in the use of that word, a meaning to it that he did not care to have applied to himself. Why, he asked himself bitterly, had he ever made the mistake of treating a woman still in her prime as an ideal or a saint? Apparently she was subject to the same weaknesses, the same struggles, the same temptations. She was of the same amorous nature . . . could it be possible? He stood in awe of the depth of her affection for him, as though an abyss had opened at his feet.

"Please, dearest," he pleaded, "not 'lover,' but just 'friend.' Can't we remain friends?"

"And you will not come again?" piteously.

"I think it is for the best," was his dogged answer.

"Jules," she said looking steadily into his eyes, "don't you realize that I worship you blindly? that day and night I think of nothing but of you and your visits? that you are present in my very dreams? Sweetheart, surely you won't deny me this happiness, this privilege of loving you. I have been deprived of love for so long."

There was a tug at his own heart, a return of his yearning. This exquisite, soft woman, whom he had adored and sanctified, was at his feet—his to command, body and soul. But the better man was in the saddle and he was determined to see it through.

"Your husband!" he protested. "Is it fair to him?"

She answered this with a rage that startled him.

"Yes! men expect so much of their wives. They have preached and sung and prated of the loyalty and sacredness of wifehood until they have sur-

rounded themselves with a smug cloak of deception. They even forget that a wife is a human being, but seem to think that with the mumbling of a few words a woman is miraculously transformed into a being that is no longer subject to the laws of nature. They think that whatever they may do, the woman will still remain a blind worshipper, a priestess in the temple of marriage."

"Nevertheless, he is still your husband," Cardot insisted.

"Yes," she cried, "that is the dull tragedy of the whole thing. A divorce would ruin him. I cannot do it! And so I am chained to a man whom I do not love any longer; one who never knew the meaning of love except when applied to himself and his work, his own selfish motives. Jules, dear, such relations are wicked, even though the sanction, and approval, and laws of the world are stamped all over them. There is a thousand times more virtue in our love!" She appeared mortified at her own vehemence, and concluded more calmly: "But what can a clean young man like yourself know about these things?"

"But I may not be the 'clean young man' you think I am," Cardot warned. "I am human like the rest. I only want to save you from yourself, and from me. We must respect the conventionalities, even if they are only man-made. After all, they are the law . . ."

"Please don't preach, darling. I know everything you are going to say. We will be friends, nothing more. Does that content you?" Womanlike, she was not going to take a decision. She would have the last say in the matter.

"That will be best," he answered, rising, "and now I must be going."

"Oh, Jules," she said tensely, "you cannot mean that you will not see me again; that you do not want to?"

"I do want to," he assured her tenderly, "but I still think it best not to."

"No, no; I cannot give you up now, Jules. Promise you will come again."

"Very well, I will," he soothed, and kissed her good-bye.

XIV

He reached the street and the cool air in a turmoil of mental self-abuse. He was a fool and a cad. Not content with retaining the rare friendship of this sensitive woman he had to make love to her and allow her to fall in love with him, thus fatally lowering her in his own eyes. His love had its origin in his illusion that she was a super-mundane creature, and he had surprised a very material love for him. He was perplexed, wavering between disappointment at the dissipation of his ideal, and the new vista of delight that was opening to his senses. He must cry *retro me Satana* to his carnal desires, banish them from his mind, suppress them, preserve the even flame of the almost spiritual friendship he had first imagined. Yes, he told himself, with bitter irony, that would be possible if she never crossed his path again. Henceforth he must worship at a distance.

When he had reached his room he had sobered. After all, it was just an experience in an era of vivid experiences. He would write her a letter of farewell and that would be the end of the whole affair.

The following day an official envelope was handed him. He tore it open with exultation, feeling that there was augury in its coming at this psychological time; that it was a sort of life-preserver thrown out to him.

The envelope contained an official order, couched in succinct military terms, to report to the commandant of the flying field at Mineola for further pursuit training.

"This is only the prelude," he thought. "I presume we shall soon be going over."

He was the mercurial Cardot bubbling over with enthusiasm. Again he was the warrior who saves his thoughts of love for his lighter hours. He sat down and wrote Mrs. Claiborne, employing the tenderest phrases of farewell he could summon. He could not disabuse his mind, in thus writing her, of a certain woodshed hypocrisy, employed by the castigating parent toward his erring son when he says, "This is going to hurt me worse than it does you." It was great to be decent! He also wrote Consuela, who had been complaining of neglect, using the Latin shrug of "c'est la guerre," the blanket excuse for all the sins of omission at the time. From thenceforth on he promised to write more frequently. To himself he promised to give her first place in his thoughts, and on the impulse of the moment he went out and bought a great box of roses, the most expensive he could find, which he dispatched, together with the letter, with a sort of uxorious comfort. After all, Peggy was his soul's anchor to windward.

. . . . . .

Two weeks of hard work, a smashed plane, a reprimand from a superior officer, and he was glad to return to the city for a week-end. He had received a piteous note from Mrs. Claiborne, but he steadfastly resolved not to see her again. So strong was his revulsion that he would probably have stuck to his guns had not fate intervened.

All reports to the contrary, New York City is small. In the little town in which he was born he used to think of the great metropolis as a gourmand that swallowed up those who came

within reach of its capacious maw; that here, outside the microcosm in which one lived, the individual was lost and what one did and what one said outside the small circle of his acquaintance did not return after many, or few days, as it did in the towns. But one has to come on Broadway occasionally, and Broadway has been said to be the Main Street of Manhattan. It is likewise the continuation of the Main Streets of all the world.

His two weeks' absence had added zest to this interesting thoroughfare, now so filled with the khaki and blue of the national forces, spiced with exotic, multi-colored uniforms of the allies. Besides, did he not wear on his breast the coveted embroidered wings? What heartaches that emblem must have caused!

It was late afternoon, and he had planned to spend the evening at the Pershing Club in company with Gray and Cavanaugh of his squadron, two of the choice spirits of cadet days, with whom he had had a joyful reunion at Mineola.

He had gone to his room in the Knickerbocker Hotel and returned to the lobby, reminiscent of the second meeting with Mrs. Claiborne, to deliver the key to the clerk. As he turned from the desk a lady bowed to him and he recognized Mrs. Wheaton.

"Good evening, lieutenant," she said, coming up. "I am glad to see you back again. You haven't seen Mrs. Claiborne yet, have you?" she asked suggestively.

"No, I haven't," he replied with stolid evasiveness.

"I am waiting here for her now." Cardot's heart began to palpitate wildly. There seemed to be no escape; it was destiny.

"Lieutenant Cardot," she continued, lowering her voice to the pink and white tones which women employ in speaking of the secret joys or sorrows of the sisterhood, "you should consider yourself the proudest man in New York City to have won the love of such a woman."

"I am proud."

Why couldn't he run? This woman inspired him with disgust, as a sort of refined procuress. And Mrs. Claiborne, instead of burying her love deep in her heart, had confessed it; had sought and received consolation and encouragement. "Well," he thought, "woe to the conquered!" Two weeks of soldiering had wrought a change in his mental attitude; or rather it came as a species of recidivism as a natural result of seeing his idol shattered. He was of the earth now.

But when Mrs. Claiborne appeared he both admired and pitied, and with these emotions came a thrill of ownership. He saw her beautiful and womanly, and, he fancied, a trifle paler than usual. She was not given to demonstration and he appreciated deeply the genuineness of her pleasure, which her features could not conceal, on meeting him thus unexpectedly.

"Oh, Jules," she cried impulsively, unmindful of the crowded lobby, "I thought I should never see you again; I had given you up for dead."

"I am very much alive, though," he protested. "I found a little work a very good tonic."

"It seems to have agreed with you," she said, surveying him fondly, "you are disgracefully handsome."

"Thank you," he answered blushing, and then with chivalrous afterthought, "would you accept a tardy compliment?"

"Women always like to hear nice things about themselves, whether they believe them or not."

"I'll have to tell you later," he said abashed. "And now, where do we go from here?"

"To my humble rooms for tea," answered Mrs. Wheaton.

Outside he took the arms of both women, holding his inamorata closely to him.

"Out with that compliment," said the brisk Mrs. Wheaton. "Is she sweet, good, dear, kind, loving, or what?"

"I was thinking of one that rolls them all together, a shotgun compliment that the Spanish use. She is simpatica."

Mrs. Claiborne thanked him with an affectionate glance of the eyes. They walked on up Broadway, stopping every now and then to examine the window displays; they made jokes about the things and people they saw, about the bell-bottomed trousers and the jaunty pancake hat of the omnipresent sailors, a uniform which caused the women to refer to them in the diminutive as "Jacky-boys."

"The 'gob' and his girl!" said Cardot, referring to a 'clashing' of blue and pink surveying, arm-in-arm, the glories of a window of marked-down dresses. "First thing you know he'll be spending a month's salary on one of those creations, and then he can go to sea happy."

And so, laughing, making light-hearted comments, they were, altogether, three very normal human beings. Over the teacups he told them tales and scandals of the camp, laughable incidents which had occurred during the week—escapades worthy of schoolboys.

"And just to think," he rhapsodized, "soon we

shall be sailing for France. Just when is a deep, dark secret, but I am sure it will be soon."

This night he was a page from mythology, Dædalus who boasted, "Minos may control the land, but I will dominate the air."

"Yesterday," he continued, full of his subject, "I made a flight over the harbor. The ships were the merest little models, the biggest buildings were dwarfed into toys and the water was as pure and vari-colored as the Bay of Naples. Everything looks so clean and quiet and peaceful when you are in the air."

"You must take us up with you some of these days," said Mrs. Wheaton.

Cardot became uncomfortable as the hour for departure drew near. He must, of course, see Mrs. Claiborne home, but he resolved that he would not tarry long at her door. She suggested that they walk. In some restraint they talked of irrelevant matters, until finally she said in a low voice:

"Do you realize, dear, that you have been cruel to me?"

"That is a good sample of feminine logic, I presume," he replied constrainedly. "You know that whatever I have done has been for our mutual good. Surely you must recognize that."

"No," she persisted, "I cannot see it that way. You are strong; you have high ideals. Is it a sin to be happy, to gain some little sweetness from life?"

"And if something should happen, you would pay dearly for it."

She reflected a moment and threw her head back with an instinct of womanly pride.

"Nothing could happen," she answered. "I am too sure of myself."

He was half convinced. "The violation of the principle of our friendship would grieve me; with that gone I should feel that I were morally bankrupt. Yet I have changed," he continued, still smiling, but with some harshness, "even since you last saw me. The business of the War is to kill and I am steeling my heart against the day when I shall have to cope with killers. I am pruning away all finer sensibilities. You see in me today the hardened trooper."

They had reached her house and paused outside. His last speech had caused a mental perturbation that she made no effort to conceal.

"Oh, Jules!" she cried, "please do not be so hard. I cannot bear to think of you this way."

"One is justified in being so in these days. We must not go on seeing each other, dear."

"But I am so distressed about your bitter attitude," she said anxiously. "Surely you will call again and let me help you overcome it."

He looked at her indulgently for a moment. "Perhaps," he half promised, and after bidding her good-night, left her abruptly. He walked to his hotel with long, nervous strides. Ashamed of having talked so roughly to her who cared so tenderly for him, he felt that he was unworthy of the love and friendship of such a woman. He called himself a brute, devoid, as he had told her, of any of the finer sensibilities. But again he was glad that he had thwarted the impulse within him. If he had not forfeited himself with this harshness of manner there would have been a debacle.

The following morning, a gentle, sunshiny Sunday, he rose in time to join the Fifth Avenue church procession. All during the night there had been a constant struggle of the flesh against the spirit, and he could not at this hour say which had dominated. Yes, he could, but he was

ashamed to admit it. He must learn to hate her, to despise the very good and beautiful in her nature which had first attracted him, in order to hold in leash the wild passions which leaped within him, demons which had thrived on the insidious poison of recurrent thought.

Thus he walked on, oscillating mentally between the blandishments of sin and the outstretched, appealing arms of the church, a figure aroused by this well-clad, orderly promenade of men and women, the harmonious chime of bells and the inviting, hospitable sunshine.

Though not in a devout mood he stepped into a small church on the Avenue, feeling much as a man who buys a cure-all, thinking: "I will try a bottle of your moral panacea; it can't help me, but at any rate it can't harm me." He regarded with inward disdain the welcoming smile of the ushers and seated himself with a cluster of khaki-clad lads, where he considered he would be less conspicuous.

The minister was a dapper little man, of unassuming personality, but his voice was clear and melodious. He read first from "Ecclesiastes":

> To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the Heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up. . . . . a time to love and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace.

From this he dwelt on the warfare of the spirit against the desires of the flesh:

> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroyeth much good.

"You men in khaki," he said, suddenly apostrophizing the little group, "subdue also the enemy within you! Assail him with every known

weapon; grant him no quarter, for he cometh to destroy you. He cannot be temporized with. There can be no truce with him, for his promise is a scrap of paper. And when you have him in your power, that is the time to kill!"

After the services Cardot walked slowly back toward his hotel, going over in his mind the experience of the morning and finding his soul singularly refreshed by it. In his room he picked up the Gideon Bible on his dresser and read all the chapters of the preacher's text, each word of which was a burning message.

It was five in the afternoon when he was awakened by the telephone in his room. It was Mrs. Claiborne. "I was so concerned about you last night—your terrible mood! Can't I see you for just a moment?"

"I will be over presently," he answered in a voice husky with passion.

Then ensued a characteristic dialogue between his better and worse selves: "Don't do it," besought the better, but he continued dressing. "I have warned her," his passions answered sternly. "I gave her frank warning." "Fool!" interrupted conscience, becoming vituperative where soft words failed. "Stop! you are rushing to your doom. . . . What will be the consequences of today's folly? Death to all that is good in both of you."

But by this time his footsteps were leading him to the street. Soon he would be in the subway which would rush him pitilessly, like the tempest within him, into sin. In vain he conjured before him the morning's sermon, the pleadings of his conscience, the spirit of sustaining friendship. In vain he recalled the wonderful prose poem he had read that morning:

> Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.

On the subway he cursed this nausea of spinelessness.

His passion was fortified with the subtle arguments of the libertine against the appeal of conscience. The gilded sin of the modern novel and scenario, license cloaked with outward decency and smugly paraded before the eyes of the world, books and plays wherein the marital relation was scoffed at and made light of, all came before him in a flood of scarlet. And with this there was the sardonic background of the War, hooting at the old order, promising free love and saying to the soldier, "Above all things, eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." There was bitter iconoclasm urged by the discovery that she whom he had worshipped as a goddess was only flesh and blood.

. . . . . .

On that day there transpired that which he would a moment later have given his right arm, nay, his very life, to have undone. He virtually reeled from the door. The bravado, the elan, of the soldier was gone. He had insulted his uniform, dragged his emblem of a militant purity into the mire.

Poor aviator! Poor Icarus who flew too close to the sun!

On his way to the hotel a saturnine proverb, long forgotten, came to his mind: "When Platonic affection and good intentions get together, the devil takes two hours' rest."

XV

He did not realize the deep poignancy of his grief until the following morning. He had fallen asleep with the sleep which tires rather than rests the body, but toward daybreak, thoroughly exhausted, he slept soundly, dreaming with exultant joy that he had met the temptation and overcome it. In the morning he awoke refreshed, still thrilling with this chaste delusion, but it required only a few seconds' recollection to dissipate it. Sleep, like strong wine, had become a mocker. He arose mechanically, suffering in the open day the abasement of the damned. He tried to measure it: had his entire family been destroyed in one great disaster, he could not suffer such torment as he was now undergoing. His honor was destroyed; it could never be replaced, never patched up.

As he was dressing the telephone rang.

"Good morning, sir," said the clerk's voice. "A lady to see you in the parlor."

"Very well, I'll be right down," he answered apathetically.

He concluded his morning preparations mechanically, never even wondering who his visitor might be.

As he stepped from the elevator to the floor of the parlor, a figure in blue, like a hot flame, ran across the room and into his arms which he had opened to receive her. It was Consuela in the service uniform of a nurse!

"Oh, Jules, I am so happy," she cried, tears shining in her eyes. "Oh, isn't it all too won-

derful!" and she laughed by way of relief, a rippling, whole-hearted peal of silver laughter, bred of moonlight nights and the orange blossoms of the South. It was so infectious that he felt momentarily cleansed, and he embraced her to his heart, close, close and raised his eyes in silent prayer.

"Let us sit on the divan. Just think of the thousand, thousand things we have to talk about, and I am leaving today."

"No!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, I am. Bound for France." They had seated themselves.

"And you're going to leave me over here?" he asked, wretchedly.

"Don't you want me to go?" she exclaimed, surprised. "What is the matter with you, dear?" She looked at him concernedly.

"Oh, nothing, sweetheart," he replied with an attempt at a smile. "I'm just a little downhearted."

"Now, I like that," she said naively. "Your sweetheart comes unexpectedly and you are downhearted. And, dearest—" she lowered her voice.

"What, Peggy?"

He knew the ordeal of denying her a kiss would be but the prelude to a confession. But how could he bring himself to kiss the innocent lips pouting before him? It would be blasphemy added to blasphemy; contagion was in his very touch.

"There is not a soul in the parlor," she whispered shyly.

"Yes, I know. It is too early in the morning," evasively and, to change the subject, "have you had your breakfast yet?"

"No, indeed! Today we are to have every meal together. Do you think I would miss that pleasure? and I'm frightfully hungry, too. We were twenty-four hours late getting in."

"But why didn't you let me know?" he demanded in fresh anguish. "Why didn't you wire me?"

"I did, Jules, and when we arrived last night, the first thing I did was to 'phone your camp, and they told me you were in town at the Knickerbocker. I was dreadfully disappointed when you didn't meet the train, so I decided to surprise you the first thing this morning."

There was a pause.

"And, dear," impulsively, "I have the most wonderful plan! I'll unfold it during the day."

"Fine!" he said, responding to her enthusiasm with a pretense of heartiness. "Does it concern me, too?"

"Somewhat," she said, looking cautiously around the room, slumbering in its heavy, vacant furnishings. "But first, haven't you forgotten something? You haven't kissed me yet."

For answer he shook his head slowly and sadly in negation, but held her more closely in his arms. Here was life, rosy, fluent life, offered and he had chosen the dull stagnancy of death.

"Jules," she clutched him feverishly, fear in her eyes, "you are acting so strangely. Tell me; what is the matter? Something terrible must have happened."

He answered with the suppressed sob of the man who seeks to hide his grief:

"Dearest, I am so utterly, utterly miserable. I am so unworthy of you, so contemptible . . ."

Instantly she was maternal, comforting him, kissing his cheek, drying the slow, painful tears.

He pushed her gently from him. "Darling," he hesitated, seeking words in which to tell her. "I'll have to give you the truth, the naked, unvarnished truth, much as it will hurt you. I am all that is base, too low to deserve even your least thought."

She looked at him incredulously. "What do you mean, Jules?"

"You will have to give me up, Peggy; forget me, obliterate me from your memory."

"What is it?" she persisted, uncomprehendingly. "Don't you love me any more, Jules?"

"Sweetheart, more than I can tell; that is why I cannot deceive you."

"I just can't seem to understand," Consuela faltered.

"I am 'damaged goods,' dear," he blurted out despairingly.

"Not—"

"Yes, dear. I have played double with the world and with myself, and now I am paying for it with all I love." He buried his face in his hands in abject misery.

She instinctively felt the depth of his despair and with gentle insistence pulled his hands from his face.

"Tell me all about it," she commanded softly.

Wretchedly he told her the sordid story from beginning to end, chivalrously exonerating the woman and assuming all of the blame himself.

"If I had only known you were coming; if I had only known, . . ." he finished brokenly.

She rose and went to the window, looking out on the determined march of early Broadway pedestrians. Her little world was crumbling. Her inherent breeding revolted and yet she found that she was suffering vicariously, more for him

than for herself. No, no, she could not give him up.

She returned to her place beside him. A heavy-footed maid with a rattling bucket plodded over the thick carpets and stopped at the other end of the room to commence cleaning the furniture. He looked into Peggy's eyes and asked quietly:

"You don't hate me, do you, dear?"

"I can't hate you, Jules. I love you," feelingly, "I always will. But—plans . . ."

"What were those plans, sweetheart?"

"The Little Church Around the Corner." She choked and could say no more.

"You poor child!" he forgot himself in her suffering. "No, dear, it would be impossible, it would be unfair to you."

"It is not impossible!" she cried with a fierceness that startled him. She was the wounded female striking blindly in defense of her loved one. "You were trapped by a designing woman. Oh, I know them, with their wiles! Hers has been the conquest, not yours. She is probably exulting while you are suffering. Forget her, won't you, dearest, and let us look to the future?" her voice had become an impassioned appeal. "I am ready to forgive you, Jules."

A wave of fury swept over him. It seemed that the punishment was greater than he could bear; that it was out of all proportion to the magnitude of the offense. Perhaps Peggy was right; the woman had tempted, not he. In his perfervid imagination Mrs. Claiborne's smile was transmuted into a sensuous grin; her very affectation of purity was a trap, a trick of the trade.

His conscience scowled him down. He could not evade the guilt of having wronged her cruelly, but the burden of the offense was the violation of

his own principles, the deliberate, bitter ravishing of an ideal. His self-loathing and self-abasement rose afresh. His was the trenchant remorse of the man who knows and respects the morals and laws, man-made or God-made, for the decency and safety of human society and yet wittingly violates one of the most sacred of the code. And with Mosaic sternness he had passed sentence on himself.

"It breaks my heart to say it, sweetheart, but we will have to release each other. I am beyond redemption; like Humpty-Dumpty I have had a great fall, and all the King's horses, all the King's men, cannot put Humpty-Dumpty together again. You see," he continued with a dismal smile, "how Mother Goose conspires with the Bible to curse me. I never realized how well I knew the Book. This one from Proverbs fits my case: 'Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonor shall he get and his reproach shall not be wiped away.' I am suffering, dear, and there is no balm in Gilead. I was not a saint before, but now I have lost the last shred of self-respect. I am incapable of the great love that is due you; my soul is dead."

Peggy sat buried in thought. For her the odium of the offense was no longer present; she was willing to overlook this. The fact that he was humble, suffering, caused her heart to swell with tenderness. His extremity was her opportunity. She loved him all the more because of his wrongdoing, viewing all from the standpoint of the culprit and, with the perverted justice of love, sympathizing and forgiving. She had seen him weep, had comforted him as she would a child, and was drawn closer than ever to him.

But she stood in awe of this disclosure of a scrupulous man's honor; the solemnity of a law self-imposed, which inexorably exacted a self-imposed penalty for its breach, terrified her. How could she rescue him from himself, from the tortures of self-condemnation? How could she reach him? Now when she most supremely desired to alleviate his suffering she was perceiving her failure. Although the words were not suited to the occasion, the famous epigram of Helmer in Ibsen's "Doll's House" kept recurring to her mind: "No man sacrifices his honor even for one he loves." It further increased her sense of failure.

She sat holding his hand and pondering. Presently she resorted to the philosophy of religion, of one less austere than that which demanded "an eye for an eye."

"Jules, dear," she said quietly, "God does not exact penalties; that would be a harsh conception of Him. He only asks sincere repentance and the firm determination to do right, and that I know you have. You know what Christ said to the woman: 'Go and sin no more.' He has seen your suffering and has forgiven."

It was her last card and she scanned his face for its effect.

He replied humbly: "You are good, sweetheart, far, far, too good for such as I."

She saw her failure and then the real woman cried out:

"Darling, can't I do anything? Not one little thing, and your heart is breaking. . . ."

She arose, stumbling, blinded by tears. A wild wave of pity and yearning went over him. He stood up and took her in his arms. He could not bear to feel that he, gross being that he was,

should make another woman wretched. He had caused havoc enough. He folded her to him in the deliriously tender embrace of one who bids a hopeless farewell to a loved one. Yes, this was just another refinement of his punishment: to be granted a view of the promised land of love and decency and contentment, and then told that he could never attain it. He must fight without ideals and after the War return to the dreary, wandering life of the hopeless. No, not that . . . a resolution had already shaped itself. He would never return.

She was calmer and looked at him with eyes brightened by her tears, in which there still glistened a ray of hope. He saw it and answered soothingly:

"Perhaps, dear, some day I may be cleansed and whole again, a real man. It is hard to explain my position today. I have violated an obligation, a duty, which was imposed by moral law. By the same token I was free to act, knowing the distinction between right and wrong. I was not watched. I was just placed on my honor, with the knowledge, too, that I would dictate my own punishment if I played false. It is this liberty of conscience that I have violated, sweetheart, that has unmanned me, made me a bad moral risk. As you say, God has forgiven me; He is not angry. It is just better for the peace and security of the world that such men as I be eliminated from the general scheme of things.

"If, dear, some time I should change and this torment should leave me, then I would go to the ends of the earth to find you. But I don't hold out any hope to myself—not now, and in fairness, justice, to you, darling, we shall have to release each other."

He had hinted of hope, but his heart was dust. He was clinging to her in a valedictory of grief. Soon they would be parted, he felt, forever.

But she drew away from him. Womanlike, she had failed to grasp his meaning. To her law for law's sake, or honor for honor's sake, would be found wanting when weighed in the balance against a great love.

"Darling, don't despise me," he pleaded.

"I don't despise you," she answered bitterly, "but it will be a long time before I throw myself at the head of another man."

He stood dumb with misery while she went to a mirror and arranged her hair, the same glorious chestnut hair which had bewildered him as a storm-tossed castaway. In her uniform she was a more etherealized Peggy, beautiful to him beyond compare. Her dress, with its simple lines, added a military touch, without rendering her militant, and nothing about her bespoke the arrant superiority assumed by some of the women who had donned it. She was still the supple, feminine Diana of pinewood and sand dune.

Oblivious of the tragedy of human hearts enacted before her, the maid had stolidly continued wiping the furniture.

Peggy turned at last, having adjusted her hat and given her hair a final pat.

"Come," she said, as though nothing had happened, "we haven't had breakfast yet and time is flitting."

They spent the day together, contenting themselves with the companionship of each other and dividing the time between a Spartan bench in Central Park, the more inviting divan of the hotel parlor, and leisurely meals amid the spotless napery, crystalware and subdued colors of

restaurants of the old order. Part of the time, lost in rapture of her buoyant freshness, there was forgetfulness and blessed nepenthe, yet these intervals were only gaps in his mental torture, hiatuses which emphasized the bleakness of despair.

As for Consuela, she had forgiven without consulting her innate purity. The toxin of his confession was unconsciously infecting her and the fever of moral revulsion was gaining ground. She had been in love with Jules, like all young girls, in the abstract, endowing him with every manly virtue, and she was unprepared for this baring of what was to her a loathsome sin. It hurt her to think that her paragon was a moral weakling; it wounded her pride to feel that he had lost sight of her image long enough to become attached to another woman. Her more human self argued that his was only the way of all men! That it was one of the shortcomings which women had to overlook. But she could not apply this liberality to her personal case, not to her man. Her disgust remained unmitigated by any logic she could summon. It occurred to her that because the consciousness of sinning was so vividly before him, his principles must be sound. But what was the use of having principles unless they were adhered to strictly, obeyed to the letter?

"No, no, no," she told herself with sinking heart, "he just will not do. I love him—yes. As much as ever?" She could not answer this with certitude. There were too many conflicting emotions of pity and self-injury. Her heart was lacerated just as surely as though with steel, but through it all was the painful, relentless decision

of the virgin, the unripened woman: "I have to give him up. I am disappointed in him."

By nightfall, when they had reached the Pennsylvania Station where she was to entrain for Jersey, the first leg of her journey to France, the progress of this corrosive of thwarted love and ambition had been such that she hated him; unconsciously she was resenting his humility as much as any other thing. Preceding him thus to the field of action only heightened this chaste loftiness; she was going to take the man's chance, he was to be the stay-at-home. Such a reversal of normal conditions did not serve to brace his pride, either. Instead, he felt it to be part of his punishment.

The parting was conventional, as she had planned. "Perhaps we shall meet in France," she began.

"Perhaps," tonelessly; "I have almost given up hope of getting over."

He made an impulsive motion as though to take her in his arms, but restrained himself.

"Good-bye," he said simply, pressing her hand.

"Good-bye," she replied, and he turned to go. She was softening rapidly as she watched him walk away. She imagined his shoulders were bent. He was not holding himself erect as a soldier should.

Hers was a heart that could embrace all suffering humanity as she called to him: "Jules!"

He turned obediently and returned, a curious, wan smile on his lips.

"Kiss me good-bye," she commanded. He held her and kissed her again and again.

Tears were in the eyes of both, and they were too full of emotion for speech. But Peggy did

manage to say: "Remember, Jules, 'A man may be down but he's never out.'"

"God bless you," he said, her show of affection and the hopefulness of the homely Salvation Army maxim sending a glow into his heart. Again they parted, Peggy making her way hastily into the crowd that was filing through the gates.

Outside, the mocker of his conscience, having rested intermittently through the day, began afresh: "Forgiveness! Can you really delude yourself there is such a thing? Can you, moral leper that you are, expect the honored place at life's banquet? Do you think forgiveness, if there were such a thing, could restore to you one jot or tittle of your vanished self-respect? Nay, it is a law you have violated; pitiless, unforgiving, inevitable—the law of your conscience. You shall pay the uttermost farthing of your sentence; there is no remission of it. Remorse and shame shall abide in your heart and will not depart from it. And the penalty is death—it is so written."

Consuela belonged to the past now; he could never be worthy of her. There was a fleeting, grim satisfaction in having been able to make this sacrifice, but it did not appear to lessen the punishment yet ahead of him. The demands of his conscience were insatiable.

In addition to his own suffering, he could conceive the anguish of Mrs. Claiborne and he resolved that he would see her as soon as possible. There would be solace in their companionship.

XVI

Ten days passed before Cardot saw Mrs. Claiborne again, and then he came in answer to an urgent note begging him to call at once. Fearful premonitions of what this summons might mean zigzagged across his mind. He was hopeful, but there was a background of black fear. Certainly it was too soon for anything serious to develop, he tried to persuade himself. Anyway he would soon know. "Damn it," he swore under his breath, "now this may be added to my troubles!"

Mrs. Claiborne opened the door before he had time to rap.

"Jules!" she sobbed out, in a voice indicative of her deep distress.

The world was suddenly crashing, buzzing, falling about his ears. The swiftness and certainty with which his punishment was being meted out dazzled him. It was uncanny. And now the soldier blanched. What of the husband? Suppose he should turn up now, or later, and wring a confession from her? The world would be too small for both of them, and again there recurred the words of the Bible: "For jealousy is the rage of a man; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance." Back of the lieutenant's uniform was the power and dignity of the nation, but behind the husband was the militant righteousness of the world and the precedent of the ages since the curtain rose on the human melodrama.

He rallied. There was still hope.

"Perhaps you have been overwrought," he suggested.

"No, no," she cried anxiously. "What am I to do?"

"I cannot help you," he anwered blankly, falling into the nearest chair.

"Oh, why did my husband ever leave me?" she moaned, agonized.

"You should have thought of him before," and then, still hopefully, "would he suspect the child as not being his own?"

"Mr. Claiborne is not a fool, my dear," she replied with a trace of scorn.

He was vaguely disappointed at the matter-of-factness of the answer, but the question had arisen out of a wild plan evolved from the maelstrom of his mind; an arrangement which would require superhuman moral courage; one which would elevate both of them above their fellow mortals into the exalted station of those heroes and heroines of modern fiction who could look down with contempt on the banal conventionalities of society. Unconsciously the insincere but specious modern philosophy of marriage was marshaling them in his mind.

"Bring the child into existence, dearest," he said recklessly. "It will be our penance, our own sweet, hidden sorrow. Such a sacrifice will neutralize the sensual in our love. Come, let us brave the contumely of the world; before the eyes of the Lord we will be its true and legitimate parents. You will be only performing the natural function for which woman was created."

His heart was becoming more triumphant, as one by one the clandestine parents of romance stepped from their pages and joined the forces of his revolution, and the false courage of this men-

tal intoxication minimized the dangers presented by such a course. Colored as his imagination was by the example of these unfettered and undimmed spirits he quite expected Mrs. Claiborne to take her place among them, for had she not a kindred courage? Here, however, he was bumping his shins against reality.

"Never," she responded with tense finality. "I would kill myself first."

He became moody and silent. Mrs. Claiborne was also silent, gazing meditatively through the curtained window now lit by the pale afternoon sunshine. As she sat on the divan, in negligée of old rose and frail lace, her high-heeled satin mules disclosing the graceful lines of her foot and ankle, she was still adorable. He was amazed at her composure, in contrast with his perturbation, yet she was the one marked for the sacrifice. His man's annoyance at a difficult situation shrank into insignificance before her problem, vast, intricate, full of danger. Who was he to suggest a course of procedure, where his part was only the easy business of paternity?

He went over and, sitting beside her, gently folded her to him and kissed her.

"We will find a way out," he said gently. "Worry and reproaches will do us no good."

"You are sweet, Jules," she said simply, and then reflectively, "isn't life horrible! We seek and pray and beg for happiness and when we have found it we are deep, deep in sin and suffering."

The plaint had in it the world-old, universal yearning, with the acute longing of the disappointed woman for happiness at any price.

"Yes, dear," he answered mournfully, "it has

all ended badly. Our friendship began so innocently, and now it is dragged into the mire."

"Oh, sweetheart," she cried impulsively, touched to the quick, "have I been such a wicked influence? Tell me I haven't."

"No, no; it was all my fault, but do not let us speak of it any more."

"It was not all your fault, though," she protested, "I could have prevented it all by a single appeal to your honor, and I left that unsaid. I am the one to blame, not you." He was listening intently, fascinated by this angle, which Consuela had suggested but which he could not bring himself to accept. The woman had planned it all. "I had to sin to quell the rebellion that was raging within me. And now I can be so good. On the whole," she continued with a note of exultation in her voice, "I haven't many regrets. I have tasted the supreme happiness I have longed for so many years. How much more precious have been the moments of love we have spent together, than the years of dreary misery of the past."

It was the eternal wanton glory of the female, mate to the male of her choice, which centuries of refinement and culture have not altered. He felt some rancor because she had not considered him, but reflected that his honor was as selfish as her love. Nevertheless he could not refrain from a bitter answer to her confession, which had not lessened his sense of injury. He knew he could make her wince.

"Yes, but look at me! A ruined man and just at the time in all my life when I could have been of real service. I have broken faith with all that was good within me. How can I ever fly with this horror dragging me down?"

"Darling," she protested passionately, arms about his neck, "you must fly! Please, please do not lost sight of your ideals, no matter what has happened. Time will take the weight from your sorrow, and you must remember only the nice things about me. Promise me that you will, Jules," she ended pleadingly, tearfully.

"I promise. And now, about you? How can I leave you to fight your battles all alone? We are sailing in a few days, you know."

She placed both hands upon his shoulders and looked full into his eyes.

"Dear, I think everything will turn out all right," she said softly.

"Do you really think so?" he cried eagerly. The momentary relief made him happy, the first time he had been so in days.

For answer she nodded her head. He drew her to him and kissed her a long farewell. She turned and buried her face in her arms on the back of the divan. Her laces were trembling with her sobs.

He bent over her, whispered "good-bye," and strode out. He fancied he heard her call to him after he had closed the door.

XVII

Three days later Lieutenant Cardot, of the Aviation Corps of the United States Army, found himself sitting in a canvas deck chair on the forward gun platform of the transport *Utopia.* It was about seven-thirty in the morning, he had just finished breakfast and now, with the sense of holiday that a man draws from the fact that he has a whole day with nothing before him to do, yet has left no duty unperformed, he lit his cigar and watched the sparkling water as it leaped before the knife-edge of one of the slender destroyers convoying them. The sun was shining merrily and the sea was calm.

Cardot with his aviation squadron was bound for France at last. The long night was over. This morning he felt as though he had awakened from a noisome, tedious nightmare to see life as it was intended to be viewed, with the poet's eye for beauty and melody. After all, those barnstormers did not have a monopoly on the harmony and fervor of the universe—a fellow could sit down and smoke a cigar in the invigorating sunshine and, with the background of a dark day, feel a poem, without the necessity of breaking out into rhyme, as one might break out into a sort of literary rash. Cardot was feeling that way this morning. He was only conscious of the moment in which he was living, and he was sipping that drop by drop, as a delicious nectar. The past seemed unreal. It couldn't have been the same Jules Cardot that trod the streets of New York City, committing crimes and indiscretions,

slinging away his time and his honor, insouciant and bitter and left-behind.

There were with him on the transport many of his boon companions of training-school days. Before entering the army he had thought such friendships existed only in the story-books, or only rarely through life. Indeed, the sincere human contacts of the army or navy do not seem to be so frequent in civil life, where man draws the veil of self-interest more closely about him.

This freemasonry which existed in all the branches seemed to be more ideal in the air forces than in any other. In the first place, its initiates were very carefully chosen. It was a select grouping of the cream of American youth; men of coolness, verve and daring; men of perfect physique; men from the ranks of the outdoor sports, football, polo, baseball; men who could take a sporting chance with death.

Their training was their initiation in this exclusive order. They had all had their "baptism of the air." In France, over the lines, they would receive their "baptism of fire." Here there would be another selection; the bolder, more intrepid would be assigned to pursuit, and the others to reconnoissance and bombing planes. For this work also the heart, the actual physical heart, would be closely inspected. High altitudes; fighting, with the consequent excitement, at twenty and twenty-two thousand feet, would make tremendous demands on what the doctors facetiously call the "pump." The cream of the cream would be selected for this work—and above all, the fighters.

The ambition to fly, to soar the azure vault of the sky, is coeval with mankind. The imagina-

tion of the early Hebrews pictured the angels with beautiful, shining white wings, and their devils and demons, the forces of evil, with the black, skinny wings of the bat; Dædalus and his son Icarus, of Greek mythology, experimented with wings, composed of the feathers of birds, and Icarus met the fate of many a neophyte that succeeded him. Through the ages this ardent desire to rival the birds of the air had persisted, until science gave its slow, grudging consent and man's will dominated the upper reaches, and with their domination carried the quarreling and bickering of the earth to the erstwhile peaceful blue.

It required the French genius and enthusiasm for invention to complete the modern airplane. To France were attracted the aeronauts of other countries who, receiving scant or scornful attention in their own lands, were welcomed and encouraged by the land of the Montgolfiers, pilots of the first successful balloons; the adopted home of Santos-Dumont and his dirigibles; the native home of the sailor Le Bris who, with stolid disregard of the punishment meted out to the Ancient Mariner, killed an albatross and experimented with its wings. It was to France that the Wright brothers carried their observations and emulation of bird-flight made on the barren coast of North Carolina, after vainly endeavoring to secure proper recognition of their efforts from the United States government. The great contribution of the Americans to the science of aviation was their cool, scientific attitude. They took the airplane out of the class of a circus wonder and groomed it for modern warfare.

And now the oft-quoted prophecy of Tennyson had come to pass, when he

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue.

On every one's tongue were the names and exploits of debonair "Aces": Gunemeyer, Ball, Immelman, Lufbery, Bishop, Thaw. And there were many, many others whose praises remained unsung.

When America entered the War there had come a plea from the Allies, based on the conviction that the war would be won in the air, for airplanes and more airplanes. Indeed there was a similar plea for ships and later for men, but with great plausibility the advocates of the airplane urged that in the air the United States could make its strong arm felt immediately. They said: "We ask you for a cheap, simple device of wood, wire, and cloth, with an engine to drive it. All its parts are standardized. In a few weeks the nation can be equipped to turn out two thousand of them weekly. We want within the year one hundred thousand of them. We do not ask for a million men. We want ten thousand bright, active, hardy, plucky American boys between twenty and twenty-five years of age. We want to give them four months' intensive training before sending them into the air above the enemy's lines."

Red tape, which seems to have replaced ingratitude as the curse of Republics, delayed appropriation and progress of the aerial program of the country, but finally construction of planes and training of men to man them was in full swing.

Away from New York City and the scenes of his dishonor, Cardot's spirits had risen, but there was in them a wild lethal intoxication. He had pledged himself to die, he had stricken his hand

with death, and his heart sang with a fanatical fervor as he felt that each turn of the propeller was carrying him nearer to his tryst, his rendezvous, with the pale, impalpable, mighty spirit that brooded over the battlefields. Death, in the popular conception, was no longer terrible or cruel; human life was not so precious or sacred as it had been a year or so ago. It had been most interesting to watch the downward trend of the market from the time of the opening gun of the war. Death had become a glory and a privilege; the old Latin war-time maxim of *dulce est pro patria mori* had been revived.

"I ought to be a happy man," he mused with inward joy. "See how kind the fates have been! I have sinned and deserved death with dishonor, yet I am permitted to die in the service, in my boots and caparisons. To shed my blood on the fields of France. . . ." And so on and on, an endless pæan of triumphant thanksgiving for this felicitous combination of circumstances which vouchsafed him the boon of sloughing off his despised material body and donning the spiritual emblazonries of the hero and martyr.

Gray joined him on deck, drawing up a chair beside him and slapping him on the knee.

"Well, our temperamental Frenchman seems to be in a pleasanter mood! Last week you were wearing a face of Holy Friday, but today you seem at peace with the world. What has been the matter with you?"

"I was having an acute attack of conscience. Ever have one?"

Gray looked at him questioningly.

"I forget you're only a child in experience," Cardot commented, condescending yet envious.

Major Ferguson, of the Medical Corps, who

had had to conceal his age in order to enter even that venerable service, had taken the vacant chair on the other side of Cardot, and had lit a cigarette which he handled with the clumsiness of a novice. He was wooing the habit, the short smoke of the soldier and the exchange of the ubiquitous cylinder of tobacco, as part of his comraderie with younger men.

"What's that you say you had?" he queried as he shook out the match and threw it into the air.

"A moral hang-over," explained Cardot whimsically.

"Ah, yes," said the doctor leisurely, "that reminds me of an incident in my life that I hadn't thought of for twenty-five years."

The boys looked at him expectantly. The old gentleman had a gift of vivid recollection.

"I was coming along a country road in Kentucky in my buggy and my attention was drawn to a mare and a colt standing together in a field. A sudden sharp clap of thunder startled them and off they went, the large horse running as fast as she could and the colt pacing along easily and keeping up with her.

"Those were the days of fast horses, and one that could smash a record brought high price—forty or fifty thousand dollars, or as high as a hundred thousand. I thought to myself: 'That colt, with proper training, would have a future!'

"The animals belonged to a ne'er-do-well in the community, a drunkard and wife-beater, with a large family of children. They all lived like dogs. I knew that he had lost the mate to the mare, so I kept thinking: 'I'll come back and offer to buy him a large horse in exchange for the colt. It will be doing him a favor because the

two together will make a team and he can do some ploughing.'

"So the next day I came back and made him that proposition. He said he would have to consult his wife and I went along so that I could protect my interests. They agreed and I went out and bought a mate for the mare. Horses were cheap in those days; in fact, out West they were killing them for shipment to France as meat. I think I paid twenty-five dollars for this one.

"I took the colt back with me and, do you know, all the way back that transaction kept whipsawing in my mind; I was trying to make it jibe with my conscience. 'Well,' I kept saying, 'I have really done the poor devil a good turn. I have fixed it so that he can go ahead and do some work, and the colt was of no use to him.' But just the same I felt a bit uneasy in my mind about it.

"I put the colt out on my farm and paid a man twenty-five dollars a month to take care of him and train him. A week or so later I went out to see him put through his paces. He did a mile in 2:42; a few weeks after that he made it in 2:35, and then in 2:28, which was the record to date. Dr. Cornish, who had come out with me, said: 'Ferguson, I'll give you two thousand dollars for a half-interest in that colt.' I told him I wouldn't sell it for two or for ten thousand dollars.

"Well, sir, do you know that that horse was on my mind all the time, that confounded animal was with me beside every sickbed, but I was stubborn. I still kept arguing that I had done nothing wrong.

"About three weeks later the trainer came in to tell me that although the colt looked all right,

in reality it was 'string-halted'; and that after every time he ran it he would have to walk it around to keep it from getting stiff. He said it was good for only a year or two before it would finally go lame.

"In the meantime, the fellow I had bought him from was going all over town telling everybody how Dr. Ferguson had cheated him out of his colt and threatening to kill me on sight. So there I was—the horse no account and my life in danger.

"The following day this fellow came by my farm in his buggy while I was out looking at some stock. He was drunk and yelling, cursing and reviling me, when suddenly his horse became frightened and ran away with him, pitching him out into the ditch by the roadside and breaking every bone I believe it is possible for a man to break and still live.

"We picked him up and took him to his home. There weren't any of the doctors that cared to handle the case, the fellow didn't pay any of his bills, so I undertook to go over there. I figured he couldn't do much harm to me in the condition he was in. I stayed up all night with him and the next day I saw Dr. Cornish. I told him all the facts about the colt, but added that I thought it was good for two years and in that time he could clean up five thousand dollars easy by running it at different fairs. I wound up by telling him I would take a thousand dollars for it, for the whole machine.

"I sold the horse and with the money I went over and paid up the mortgage on my patient's house, and there was enough left over to send his oldest daughter to business school. She later obtained a fine job in the county clerk's office

and the man himself set up a little stand of some kind. So, all in all, I felt satisfied that I had made all possible amends and my conscience was clear. I really hadn't thought of that incident for twenty-five years."

The old doctor looked around serenely at his auditors. Cardot envied a man who could live to such a ripe age and have so few skeletons in the closets of his mind. He was ruminating, comparing the peccadillo of the doctor with the social wrong he had committed.

"You were fortunate," he said finally, "in being able to repent and make reparation, but suppose that both of these things were impossible; can you imagine such a case?" Unconsciously he was seeking the unction of professional advice.

The doctor caught the spirit of the boy's question and deliberated some little time before answering. It appeared as though he had first to answer it for himself.

"Cardot," he said finally, "I always think of sin in the terms of the physician, as a disease or an imperfection which has to be remedied. Of course, it is an offense entailing a penalty, but disease also exacts its penalties. The suffering and punishment that follow in the wake of sin are the medicine designed for its cure; they are intended to help and save the victim. Doesn't that appeal to you as reasonable? The Lord has endowed us with common sense, more or less. Isn't it right for us to credit Him with common sense? Do you think He would have put mortals on this earth with capabilities of plunging themselves into eternal ruin? All through nature we see manifestations of Divine love and providence. The body is equipped with devices for isolating poisons, eliminating them or casting a septic wall

around them, and that is true also in the soul of man, which is nearer God than his body."

Cardot admired the optimism of the old doctor; there was a soothing quality in the very tones of his voice. He was grateful that the older man had not spoken of the hereafter and offered him that spurious currency, the promissory note with which religion has transacted so much of its business. Still he could not help feeling that there were many fallacies in the argument. The doctor had spoken of poisons, but not of overdoses, which swept their victim away. Human forgiveness was not as simple a thing as the doctor had made it out. Cardot continually pictured himself as the culprit before the bar at which a stern, impersonal, mechanical law was being administered. The Judge was merely doing his duty in a passionless way. Society dare not remit the penalty of the offenders against its laws.

He did not contest the point further, feeling that it might lead to a highly metaphysical or theological discussion. However, the problem had never presented itself so vividly as it did now. He kept wondering if there were any way out, any way of repentance, but the offense appeared to be un-atonable and the chance therefore hopeless of being "at-one" with himself.

XVIII

At the departure of Lieutenant Cardot, Mrs. Claiborne was left like a ship hung on a hidden rock, far out in a bleak and stormy ocean. Should she salvage or destroy? She was the captain of her destinies and, in either event, the odium of the wreck would attach to her alone. The situations in which she would solve her problem presented themselves with the distinct sharpness of objects after a shower; there was no longer any haze; her perceptions were cold and brittle. She found for the first time in her life of rosy-hued religion that she could regard suicide dispassionately, as if detached from her own personality. A mere pull of the trigger and the ship would be scuttled, the water would close about it and it would no longer imperil navigation. That was one course to pursue, but she abandoned it, at least temporarily, because of the consequences with which it was fraught. The bullet hole might be clean, but the rent made in the fabric of her family life, and of society, would be jagged and irreparable.

Her emotions swept over her like summer squalls, kaleidoscopic in their variety and color. One of her first flaming impulses was to go to her husband, tell him all, and flaunt her condition before him, boast of it as a consequence of his neglect; to turn tigress and bear the child; to curse him. But when the feeling had passed over, she could only sadly acknowledge the absurdity of such a plan. She was not the tigress type; she lacked the Amazonian courage it demanded.

Besides, neither he nor the world could ever condone a woman's weakness when her virtue was involved. Strangely enough he was assuming a new value; their positions had suddenly been reversed. He was the one sinned against and she was the sinner. He had trusted her and she had betrayed him. She railed against the smug deceiver within her, which had permitted her to regard her liaison as a measure of retaliation. The fact that she was caught with the goods, as it were, should not heighten her sense of guilt, but she had to admit, with disgust, that it did. It constituted a separate offense, a breach of the Spartan law which justified stealing if it was successfully carried out.

As to Cardot, she had written him a note a day or so after he had last visited her. "Have no anxieties on my account, dear," she said, "all is well with me, and remember only the best. Keep up the fight for civilization, and for yourself."

Even as she wrote them, the words seemed trite and futile; empty, glaring forms. He was Lothario, the carefree soldier who betrays the country girl and leaves for parts unknown, bragging and smirking to his companions of his conquests. Perhaps he was doing that now. She was merely an amorous incident in his life. No, no, she told herself, as mellow recollection dissolved her animus, that was not the Jules she first knew, the clean boy who had so proudly shown her the picture of his sweetheart; the pathetically lonely youth that had accompanied her home on that first afternoon, or the vivacious, whole-souled boy-man of the sparkling, golden hours they had spent together, when the wings of his uniform had flashed like the shield of Sir Galahad as they

passed in their slow lovers' walk from the shade of the trees into the patches of sunlight. She, herself, had made the comparison and called him her knight. Like all women, she knew men and their attitudes and moods, and instinctively recognized them. Theirs had been at first an idyllic, Platonic love, something more poetic than a brother and sister affection, something not so ardent as the passion of sweethearts; something infinitely tender. He, too, had capacity to suffer; he, too, must be suffering.

It was another experiment in friendship that had ended disastrously; they had played with fire and were burned. They had crossed the infinitely slender line which separates right from wrong, and now, in the aftermath of sorrow and torture of soul, it was hard for her to say whether the devil had tempted her, or she had tempted the devil. Rather the latter. Of course, it was the latter, she told herself bitterly. The devil was a misused saint beside her. With her generations of culture and clean, quiet family life behind her, she had so far forgotten herself. Forgotten, nonsense! She could not stifle that insistent small voice with a lie. She had committed herself deliberately, feeling that she could trifle with sin and come away unscathed; now she was Lady Macbeth, sighing that all the perfumes of Arabia could not again sweeten her soul.

The agony of a fine character is the most tragic of griefs, but, as though this suffering were not enough, there came an onward-marching shame, from which she knew not where to turn for refuge. At first she had deluded herself with the belief that after all she might have been mistaken, but now she was certain.

There was still time. Other women had oblit-

erated the traces of their shame; now she, the fastidious Julia Douglass, must undergo this ordeal. But here she ran again into the blind alley of self. She found she could not bring herself to consult any reputable physician, fearing that after the terrible prostration of guilty confession, her case might be coldly refused. Chills of horror passed over her when she thought of leering mid-wives and doctors of questionable reputation, with their dirty offices and unclean paraphernalia. There was no one to whom she could turn. If Jules had only remained. . . . He would have helped her.

Weeks passed and nothing had been done toward the alleviation of her condition; she was tasting the bitterest of life's bitterness. In the quest for some solution of her problem she had become a wanderer, seeking the crowded streets, regarding the people blankly as one who is desolate, homeless and unloved. Her friends, noticing the change, besieged her with alarmed questions, but she put them off with the usual plea of war-strain and general restlessness.

Yes, the novels had lied. How could she ever have believed that a self-respecting woman could enter into intimate relations with a man other than her husband and retain any vestige of her virtue? It was a gossamer texture which violence dissipated in thin air, as the traceries of frost melt before the sun.

Yet, alternating with these bitter thoughts, there came at times a curious sensation of brooding tenderness and awakened womanhood. In this mood the jests of fate seemed less cruel, the world not so harsh. and she wondered if she did not stand upon the threshold of a fuller life. Why, after all, should she not bear the child,

the consummation so devoutly hoped and prayed for, the mirage in the desert of an unhappy union, which had so many times appeared before her eyes? For this relief had her starving organs cried through the long nights when she had listened to the noises of the city dwindling from a flood to a meandering trickle of sound and then, as day grew on, gradually resuming their volume; nights of white torture, when she had tried every method short of drugs to induce sleep.

"No, no, no, it cannot be," she kept repeating, and mentally she shrank as before a knife when she thought of the barefaced odium of the English term applied to such a child. Still, in the midst of her positive denial of such a possibility, her hands mechanically began to busy themselves with sewing and knitting of little things, which she hid with a meticulous care altogether pathetic.

And one day fell the hammer of doom—a telegram from her husband announcing that he was returning. She thanked the Lord fervently that he had wired. But he was not far off. The message had come from Chicago. Now she must act quickly.

It had been the event most dreaded of all the complexities which her situation presented, yet she was glad the suspense was to be ended. She could not tell if there had been any note in her letters to inspire it, but his responses were of increasing tenderness; he was referring constantly to the War and his desire to be in uniform. His work was not nearly completed but she was aware that he was vaguely dissatisfied. She had not intended by anything she said to hasten his return. If he would only enlist and be sent to France, there would still be opportunity for deception. If—if . . . the chances were

that he would be stationed in some training camp near New York City or, wherever stationed, would be granted leave of absence to come home before being sent abroad.

There was nothing left for her to do, but to go; to sink herself without trace.

The following morning, a few hours before her husband was due to arrive, she packed a few belongings in her suit-case and, passing through the dining-room, left a short note under the flower vase on the table.

"I have gone forever, Fred," it ran. "Please do not search for me, and if you can find it in your heart, forgive me." It was the conventional dramatic note of the fleeing wife.

For a moment she imagined herself, facing her husband across the white linen, waiting on him, satisfying his every whim.

"I would be so good to you, Fred," she whimpered. "I am humble, submissive, meek; all the rebellion is gone. I have purchased goodness, but it has cost me enough. . . . . Dear God, won't you give me a chance to expiate, only a chance. . . . ."

Her courage stiffened; she dried her eyes and went out. At the Grand Central Station she inquired about trains to Chicago. One was leaving in fifteen minutes. She did not buy a ticket. Instead, galvanized by an inexplicable woman's instinct, she returned, tore up the note and awaited the coming of her husband.

XIX

The almost superhuman mechanism of Frederic Claiborne had been driven relentlessly for years by a burning ambition to make a name for himself and to scale the heights of his profession as a civil engineer. He was a man, every inch of him, with a man's capacity for affection and desire to be loved. But he had steadfastly sacrificed every tender emotion, feeding it to the Moloch within him. This had not always been the case; in his youth he had looked forward to matrimony as the normal and happy state of every real man, but he had begun the subversive process early in his career, and it had become a habit when he married. He liked to compare his life to the mountains amid which he was now working—stern, chaste, barren peaks to whose summits he must aspire, for the ascent of which he must save his strength; nor must he dilute it with softening influences. At the foot of the mountains lay the broad, fertile plains of comfortable married life to which he would some day return.

But, as with so many other people, the universal solvent of War was fast dissolving his structure of life. With the entry of the United States into the conflict, his work was belittled. Over there were still higher peaks to scale. War made a strong appeal to his egotism as well as his patriotic fervor.

Its principal effect, however, was to turn the tide of his thoughts to his wife. He was experiencing the flood of tenderness toward the weaker member of his household that came with

the reflection that she might be in danger, either actual or threatened.

He acquainted his chief, the bluff, coarse-featured Kent, with the trend of his thought and his growing dissatisfaction with civil life. The latter was plainly worried.

"Fred," he said, "you know damn well we can't spare you. Good men are getting scarcer and scarcer—and, well, you can't go. That's all there is to it."

"But I'm quite a young man yet," Claiborne persisted, arguing as much with himself as with his superior. "I can shoulder a musket, or serve in the Engineer Corps. You know how badly they are in need of engineers over there now."

"I know, I know," answered the older man more patiently, "that's very true. But we need men on this side, too. You'll be exempted on two grounds: you are engaged in a public service work, and you are a married man with a dependent wife."

"That's the point I was coming to," flared Claiborne. "That might technically exempt me, but it occurs to me that the able-bodied married men are just the ones who ought to be in it. They have more at stake. I wouldn't want it to be said in after years that some other man had to protect my home, while I was safely ensconced in the mountains of Oregon."

"Sentimentally speaking, you may be right; logically, you are all wrong. This work has to go on and you know it. There is too much dependent on you at the time for us to release you, so please don't let me hear any more of this brand of war-talk."

Kent was handling him as diplomatically as possible as the bugbear of disaffection on the

part of his righthand assistant loomed before him. He had even gone so far as to insert the word "please," an appeal that he had long since dropped from his vocabulary in addressing his men.

But the war was beckoning like the vague, formless ghosts of the Cascade recesses, and Claiborne wrote asking for information as to a commission in the Engineer Corps. He felt sure that once he had made up his mind he could easily get away. In due time he received a communication stating that in view of his schooling and experience a captain's commission would be tendered him at any time that he saw fit to accept.

It was on the tenth anniversary of his marriage that he determined with crisp decision to start East. He would not have remembered the date had it not been for an entry in an old diary that he had picked up inadvertently late that afternoon. The daily record had not been continued and the explanation of its existence in the camp was that it contained some of his earlier scientific notes. It was the sole memento of his wife that he carried with him and he had stumbled on it only by chance.

And now he re-read the legend: "Today I have married the one woman in the world—dearest, sensitive, fine-fibred Julia—an aristocrat to her finger-tips. What terrific responsibility I feel for her happiness. Herewith I highly resolve that not the tiniest cloud, not the least fleck of discord shall cast its shadow over her. She is the one woman who will make a complete man of me. . . ."

Could he ever have been capable of writing such extravagance, he asked himself. Yet he shuddered to think of the few times he had per-

mitted a really conjugal sentiment to linger in his single-tracked brain.

The discovery of this poor, long-forgotten screed proved to be the continental divide between the cold, ambitious man and the sympathetic, loving husband. She had had ambitions, too, he recalled. Her love for music amounted almost to genius; she was a devotee of literature and the arts, yet he had listened impatiently, as to a child's prattle, when she had talked of them. She had passionately desired children, had openly begged him to allow her to become a mother; he had ruthlessly condemned her to a life of privation, in which this natural instinct, together with her special talents for self-expression, were to be suppressed.

"Poor Julia," he said tenderly, visioning her reserved, silent loveliness, "poor Julia; I've given you a pretty bad deal. When I get home I'll do my best to make up for it."

The writing had become dimmed with the pent up grief of a stubborn nature. Never once did it occur to him that the castles of the heart should not be left without their guardians; that, starving for comradeship, his wife might have sought elsewhere the sympathy denied by him. No, she was made of finer clay.

He arose from the bunk on which he was sitting, secured a telegraph blank and wrote out a congratulatory message, announcing his intention of following hard on its heels. Then he went to have it out with Kent.

On board the transcontinental express that hurtled itself through the jagged granite cuts and sylvan gloom of the mountains, Claiborne's thoughts of home outran its swiftest onset. There was now in him an ardent longing to see his

wife, to crush her in his arms and beg forgiveness for his neglect, a desire heightened by the thought that she had never chided him, never accused him of denying her affections.

"It was never in her to do that," he reflected. "Too much pride. . . . To think what a fool I have been!"

There was a trace of anxiety in his face. Suppose it were too late to make amends? No, he concluded, the sentimental value of the War would cure that and when he returned they would begin life on a new basis. He would grant her every desire.

. . . . . .

The reunion of husband and wife under such circumstances would naturally be most affecting; it was a trying ordeal for both of them. In the mysterious loom of marriage their lives were woven together and on her part, though her heart was shaken with misery and dread, the advent of her husband was strangely comforting. It was the first ray of the morning sun after the terror of night, bringing with it the promise of the resumption of suspended workaday life. She scanned his face for a hint of suspicion of a change in her and, seeing none, gained confidence in herself.

As for him, he experienced the delicacy of the lover in patching up a quarrel wherein he was conscious of being most to blame. His stiff-necked disposition was seeking the path of least resistance to reconciliation, but as the days passed and he saw her always happy to be near him, turning her gentle face to him with no sign of rancor, he became convinced that she held none, and his restraint melted.

He withheld from her the information that he

was applying for a commission in the army, hesitating to impart it because he feared that she might think he had come home only for this reason and that New York City was merely a stop-over on his way. But it was only a few days after his arrival that his commission as captain arrived, and then it was that his tenderness began to terrify her. She felt that she could not bear to alter her opinion of him, to lessen the distance or cancel the ancient grudge. It was a measure of self-protection against the tidal wave of condemnation which blackly threatened her.

That evening, seated on the divan on which she had received the blandishments of her lover, she almost expected it to proclaim her guilt aloud. She shuddered from the touch of her husband's arm about her neck as she would from a serpent, yet she dare not by any word or sign betray herself. She must play her rôle of solicitous, loving wife.

"I suppose you will soon be leaving me all alone again, won't you?" She was afraid she had said it too hopefully. "'It seems our whole married life has just been a series of partings. Dearest, you must make a list of all the things you will need so I can get them ready for you."

"I will need only the usual knitted articles—sweaters and socks, which the Red Cross are furnishing so abundantly that you needn't bother about them. You and I, sweetheart, are to have a second honeymoon. There must be nothing to mar our pleasure before I sail. The *vita nuova* is to date from this time, isn't it, dear?"

He was watching the effect of these words with trembling anxiety. Never, he thought, had her bosom been so white; never had her fingers lain upon his hand so softly caressing. Never before

had he sounded the depths of her beseeching eyes.

"Yes, Fred," she answered simply, "it is to date from this time."

"Do you mean that you forgive me for all my neglect of you?" He was moved to tears of ecstasy as he crushed her in his arms and kissed her.

"Everything, my husband." His ardor was sending a genial warmth through her soul. She would not for worlds forego that sympathy.

"It is much more than I deserve, heart of mine," he whispered, still holding her close. "I see now what a brute I have been."

"No, no, no!" she protested. "Let us have no regrets. The past is dead and the new life is begun. Oh, we shall be happy," she cried, sitting up suddenly and clapping her hands, while he watched her with rapt amazement. "We will blend all of the joy of the present and all of the sorrow of the past in a wonderful symphony while you are here. It will be a concentration, a whole lifetime of emotions crowded into a few days. The troubles of the years gone by will be only a background to make our present happiness brighter, won't they, sweetheart? Besides, they say sorrow is a part of love—and now, is it too late to go out? We will begin our festivities this very night."

"It is the very shank of the evening." He consulted his watch. "Put on your things. We will go to the New Amsterdam roof."

"I'd love it," she cried, jumping to her feet. At the door she turned, "Freddy, you remember the little blue dress that you admired so much when we were first married? I have one almost identical. I will wear that."

In her room as she stooped to open her bureau

drawer, Julia, the dissembler and hypocrite, glared at her from her mirror, but she frowned her down. Tonight she would be happy, her state of nervous excitement, approaching intoxication, promised that. And if necessary she would drink to sustain it. "Come," said Omar, "fill the cup, and in the fire of spring your winter-garment of repentance fling."

And so for five happy days they were inseparable. He was a devoted lover, content during all the extravaganzas or plays they attended to feast his eyes on her. Happiness to him, also, had come as a shock and with an intoxicating effect after the years of abstemious aspiration. She entered into his mood, divining that his spirit needed her spirit; she dressed in the clothes she knew would please him, she laughed and said daring things and forsook her customary dignity. It was the Indian summer of the austere winter of repentance, but again and again in intervals of mental sobriety she told herself in the words of Louis XV, "After this, the deluge!" On the fifth day after his home-coming he received his orders to embark for France.

XX

Cardot and his outfit reached Brest in safety, and here they rehearsed and practiced the flying tactics they had learned in the United States. Then they were transferred to Issoudon for instruction in acrobatics and formation flying. After a few weeks of this Jules and a number of other fliers who had started the ground course at the same time, were assigned to a squadron at Columbey-le-Belle.

Among these men was Grey, over whom Cardot had established a sort of big brother protectorate. He always thought of him as "little Gray," the boy was so ingenuous and pure-minded in his twenty-one years. The tenor of his life seemed to be quite undisturbed by unhallowed desires; he was forever talking of his girl in Missouri, and of the future with her that he was looking forward to after the War. Yet he seemed utterly fearless, never giving a thought, apparently, to the day when they should meet the Boche in mid-air. Cardot wondered what his own conduct would be under fire. Death he would welcome, but would the Lord vouchsafe him the death of a brave soldier, did he deserve such a privilege? Years counted here, he had to admit, and temperament, too. He was given to too much introspection.

They were full-fledged chasse pilots now, making daily flights in formation with more experienced men over the lines. They hovered high over the reconnaissance and bombing planes, dodging the high explosives, which barked around

them with a mastiff-like "woof!" At first this had been tremendously exciting sport, but as he learned to avoid them easily by shifting position and getting out of range, he began to look forward with tense expectancy to his first encounter with the unseen enemy, the hawk and, at the same time, the submarine of the skies, inasmuch as German planes lurked beneath the clouds as German boats beneath the waters.

Stirring events followed one another in rapid succession and with great variety; no two situations seemed alike. One day he was flying over the lines with an observer when a high explosive shell crashed into his engine, stopping it almost instantaneously. Fortunately his machine had considerable headway and his altimeter registered around eight thousand meters, so he felt confident he would be able to reach his field. He was gliding easily to earth, when the observer, reaching forward and striking him on the shoulder, called:

"I wish you'd look what we're getting into!"

Cardot cast his eyes below and there was a long, sinuous line of gray—German soldiers in formation, headed, apparently, in the direction of the field. His heart beat violently against his ribs.

"I guess this ends our usefulness for the duration," he called back. "Let's get ready to fire the plane when we land."

But as they approached nearer, they saw that the line was punctuated with figures in the familiar O. D. The formidable array were cowed and exhausted German prisoners being marched to the rear.

After three weeks of vivid experiences, Cardot and others of his squadron were granted a three days' leave, which generally meant a visit to

Paris. And so they started out, an animated, care-free group, happy to be relieved from the strain they had been under, each one eager to seek the pleasure that individually appealed to him. Since their time was short, this quest would necessarily be intensive. A few like Cardot had never seen the world-famous capital, and merely to visit its gardens and art galleries, sit in the open-air cafés, sip their wine and watch the cosmopolitan crowd, promised sufficient amusement.

Cardot and Gray registered at the Hotel Continental, and together made a tour of the city, viewing buildings and monuments and boulevards that have made the postal card famous.

On Sunday afternoon, a rare, sunshiny, fall afternoon on which all Paris, military and civil, exotic and native, was promenading beneath the chestnut trees, Cardot left Gray sleeping to join the endless procession. He had left the Champs Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe and turned into the Bois de Boulogne, when above a ceaseless flow of French endearments, emanating from the lips of a voluble poilu and directed to an equally animated little French miss, he heard a familiar ripple of laughter. Consuela's, of course! He was not surprised; he had come to Paris with the premonition that he would meet someone from home in this central office of the world, possibly Consuela, though he had not permitted it to become too ardent a wish, fearing with innate superstition that the desire might defeat the operation of chance, which flings the unusual, the unexpected, to the surface.

Looking ahead of the garrulous French couple, he saw her in her blue nurse's uniform, clinging to the arm of an American officer, who was looking down at her with a quizzical face, in

which he fancied there was just a little too much affection.

He quickened his pace and came up beside them. Consuela was startled at first, and then beamed with delight.

"Jules!" she exclaimed, "Of all the people in the world! Oh, isn't it wonderful . . . Lieutenant Cardot, Captain Duane."

The men bowed, shook hands and murmured their pleasure. Cardot noted the caduceus of the Medical Corps on his collar.

"I just can't get over meeting you," continued Consuela enthusiastically.

"Paris is the place where all the bad pennies of the world turn up now," said Cardot. "And how have you been, where are you stationed, how do you like it over here, and everything? I have a perfect machine gun barrage of questions to fire at you."

"And I have at you too. You must excuse us, Clarence," begged Consuela, turning to the captain, who was listening to these personalities with a little coolness. "Lieutenant Cardot is an old friend." Cardot winced when she called the man by his first name. There immediately sprang up between the two the instinctive dislike of rivals, while Consuela rambled on, blandly encouraging Cardot to accompany them and apparently enjoying the situation.

"My time is very limited," protested the flier. "I have to report back at the field this evening." The captain brightened considerably and inclined his head as though beginning a nod of good-bye-glad-to-have-met-you, but Consuela begged and Cardot lingered.

"Come on, Jules, stroll with us awhile and then

we will all have lunch together. You can refer them to me if you are A. W. O. L."

"The old excuse—*cherchez la femme,*" said Cardot yielding. "It doesn't get you anywhere in the army, does it, Captain?"

"Hardly," answered the latter. "Rather it's an excuse that's been sadly overworked."

"I am stationed at the hospital at Vichy," went on Consuela, looking up at the aviator with something of the old gentle light in her eyes. "Can't you look me up some time in going to or from your station?"

"You certainly may expect a visit," agreed Cardot heartily. "I am coming on my next leave, provided I continue to evade the Boche."

"If you have a run-in with them and come off second best, trust the old M. C. to take good care of you," interposed the captain. "You know we weren't sent over here as entertainers."

"You are entirely too modest, Doctor," said Consuela mischievously. "I consider you quite a capital entertainer, and Paris is still alluring."

He shot a look at her as though not quite sure of her meaning, and apparently he preferred the military title to the professional. He was rather a handsome type, with heavy black hair, full red lips, with much of the animal apparent in his features. He was booted and spurred and Sam-Browned. Military life evidently made a great appeal to his ego, and Cardot pictured the commotion he must cause, striding into his hospital amid the frightened "Attention, men!" of his underlings. He pitied the poor soldiers that must come under the surveillance of one of these. Yet Consuela was apparently attracted; there was an air of intimacy, as Jules had noted when she called him by his first name. Cardot waited

for further evidence and registered a vow that if the doctor wore the spurs, he would give him a chance to win them. Things had changed since the gloomy day he had bidden her good-bye at the station in New York; the complexion of the world was not the same now. He was not ready to cry quit-claim to his interests; he had never felt that he had permanently relinquished his rights, and now that they were threatened he determined to fight for them to the last ditch.

Another favorite illusion of romanticism had gone by the board. The heroines of prose and poetry might pine for lost loves, but certainly the latter-day woman did not. There are rules, of course, which prove the exception, but shorn of the drool of ages, there is certainly no good reason why the woman, who has most at stake, should not choose and select—in other words, "shop"—to her best advantage in the marriage mart, even though forced to quiet her heart as she would a child that nagged for something it couldn't have. Love, with the woman of today, abides more and more in the realm of the gilt-edged security, and less in the nebulous land of the affections, and Cardot sensed in the captain the dangerous appeal of affluence.

By this time they had reached the Café de Longchamps and were conducted to a table by a bowing garçon. Consuela was still favoring Cardot with much of the excited joyousness of her conversation, and he was beginning to believe that after all the intimacy was only one born of propinquity in the hospital. As they sat down, he was repeating for the third time his intention of visiting her at the first opportunity, trusting his ardent gaze to convey what the purport of that mission would be.

"Since you are progressing so nicely with your French," she said when they had seated themselves and the waiter had passed the lists, "perhaps you can test your ability on the carte de jour."

"Yes, let this be my pleasure," begged Cardot hurriedly, anxious for this advantage. Also it recalled that last day they had spent together in New York City.

The doctor was plainly put out and as the aviator began to pore over the items he asked in a reproving aside:

"Aren't you beginning rather early, my dear, to conserve our resources?"

Cardot looked up quickly.

"I was just saying to Miss Childers," said the doctor in sharp tones, "that I thought the honors should be ours, inasmuch as she has a perfectly good fiancé with her. So you really must consent to be our guest. We are still celebrating, you know."

It was a bolt out of the blue, dazing him, but Cardot answered with all the sangfroid he could summon:

"I yield, of course, in that event. Please accept my felicitations, both of you. I wish you all the happiness in the world, and Peggy knows that comes from my heart, don't you?"

She nodded assent as Cardot shook hands with both of them.

The doctor became gayer on assuming the rôle of host and head of family. Having performed the ritual of the menu with the air of a boulevardier, he hitched his chair nearer Peggy and putting his arm around her requested Cardot's opinion as to whether he had not chosen the finest girl in the world.

Peggy squirmed, mutely protesting, whereat he desisted, but remained extremely solicitous. It was a painfully embarrassing moment for Cardot.

"No more of this so-called single blessedness for me, Lieutenant," he said patronizingly. "When you find the right little woman, as I have, you want to cleave to her. They are few and far between these days."

Cardot nodded in agreement. The waiter brought chicken liver sautés, and wiping the glasses to crystalline clearness filled them with wine.

"I suppose a toast is in order," said Cardot, raising his glass.

"They have been out of style for a long time," Consuela objected, reddening.

"Oh, let the lieutenant get it off his chest, if he's got a good one," the captain interrupted. "I always envied the man that could remember them."

"I don't remember any, either," said Cardot. "Mine has to be impromptu. Let me see," he found he had to study. Several epigrams which came to his mind alluding to the other man's happiness would not do.

"How does this sound?" he asked finally.

" 'Here's to the bride, the end of the War,
And the fragrant pines of home;
The moonlight charm of a palm-clad shore,
And a castaway out of the foam.'

"I had to include that last line in order to make it rhyme," Cardot explained to the captain when they had all drunk in response. "It has reference to the time I was a poor shipwrecked sailor and Miss Childers succored me. Quite romantic, wasn't it? It is proof positive of the heart of gold."

Consuela put out her lips with a maternal pity. "Poor Jules!" she said softly.

"I think she has told me the story," said the captain flatly, devoting himself to the carving of a generous steak, which had just been laid before him. "Here's another reminder of home."

Throughout the meal Cardot was eating out his heart and he could not help feeling that his dejection, concealed as well as he could manage it, had a depressing effect on the party.

As they were finishing their charlotte russe and café noir, the captain saw an acquaintance, one of a group of American officers, several tables away from them.

"There is Major Abercrombie over there," he said, laying down his napkin. "If you will excuse me I would like to talk to him a minute or so."

As soon as he had left, Cardot leaned across the table.

"So this is the end," he said abysmally. "Peggy, Peggy, how could you do it?"

"Oh, please don't, Jules!" she begged in a strangled voice. "You are making me feel like a criminal. You know how much I loved you—"

. . . "

"And you don't any longer?"

"You have no right to ask that, Jules. That's indelicate in you. Besides, you were the one to request the breach."

"Yes, I did," he admitted, "but I hoped you would understand. I didn't want to relinquish my claims."

"I know, Jules, I know," she answered feelingly. "A woman sometimes has to make a change; she can't always consult her heart. Sometimes we love not wisely, but too well."

"You are wrong, dear," he told her. "One

cannot love too well. But I wish you every, every happiness. Perhaps, after all, you are doing the wise thing," he added, with a moment's reflection. He stopped himself on the brink of extolling her prospect of comfort and security as the captain's wife, realizing the banality of such a remark.

"You believe I still care for you, don't you?" pleaded Consuela with agitation.

"That's poor consolation now, Peggy," he said, "unless, unless . . ." He did not finish his sentence. She was shaking her head in negation.

"It is too late now, Jules."

"Too late," he repeated awkwardly. "I am sorry."

The captain returned to his place and after he had paid the score they rose and sauntered to the door, where Cardot made his adieux and walked dejectedly back to his hotel.

XXI

"Five o'clock and clear weather, sir," muttered an orderly, shaking a slumbering figure. Cardot jumped to his feet and began to dress rapidly. His first morning thoughts were always rhapsodies in the consciousness that he was flying on the fields of France. Then there invariably followed the anti-climax, the mess he had made of things in New York, which, like Banquo's ghost, still haunted the feast of his present happiness. It was the dead fly which caused the ointment of his honor to send forth a stinking savour. And invariably he repeated the formula: "I still have a healthy conscience."

To all this self-reproach had now been added the bitter disappointment of Peggy's engagement, a formless but poignant sense of loss which served to increase the area of contusion within him. His heart was a stone-bruise which became only more exquisitely painful with this latest trauma.

In the next room Gray was singing in a completely awakened voice, a stuttering song dedicated to a country wench named Katie.

"Pipe down on that!" cried Cardot, when at the tenth inning it was beginning to fray his nerves.

"Don't like that song, eh?" said Gray affectionately. "Say, when do we eat?"

"Pretty quick now, old thing," replied Cardot with energy. "Got to be on our toes, this day, because Fritz is on his. Great stuff, eh? We two slated for the early morning patrol! Remember in ground school how we used to cheer when the old training boats went over us, and here we are

playing 'shinny on your own side' with the Boche."

"Right-o," called Gray. "We'll have to do the town after today's work."

They were quartered in a village twelve kilometers back of the lines on the Chateau-Thierry front. In a few minutes they had gulped their coffee and clambered into the automobile waiting outside. There was no sound of war, and, by a strange coincidence, very few signs of it. It seemed the somnolent, early-morning village of the world over.

They reach the field as the east is turning a hard bluish-gray, suggestive of steel and a grim day's fighting. As yet the guns are all stilled and a lark, rising, trills its song with the same joy as in the days of peace.

But what are these ghost-like bulks silently taking their places side by side on the misty field? For the moment one imagines they are lost souls lining up for roll-call. The voices of the mechanicians are subdued and their dim figures fit in somehow with the unreal, purgatory-like aspect. Surely this is not life on the matter-of-fact planet of a few years back.

"Why not make an end today?" whispers a voice within Cardot. "There is nothing simpler, you know." "Not a thing stirring," he answers it scornfully. The dialogues between his two selves were always conducted in the picturesque language of the day, and often he did not hesitate to apply terms to himself that he would not have cared to have anyone else use. "Whatever I am, I haven't been proven a coward—yet; and self-destruction is the lowest form of cowardice. . . . So ease up on that suicide stuff."

The aviators don their fur-lined shoes and ad-

just their leather flying hoods. Besides Gray and Cardot there are three others, five in this morning's patrol, and they are to relieve five others who have been doing a tour of duty over the lines. The sky has changed from gray to pale blue and the east is shot with pink. It is light enough to fly.

Gray has been talking the while about his girl, an inexhaustible subject for him, while Cardot has been listening politely. Now the deafening roar of the motors cuts off the possibility of further conversation. The machines are one-man Spads in which the aviator is pilot and gunner rolled in one.

The men climb heavily into their seats. The mechanician standing before the huge propeller asks the question: "Coupe?" meaning "Your switch is not on, is it?" and as the aviator answers "Coupe," he turns the propeller over in order to gain as much compression as possible. "Contact!" then yells the mechanician. "Contact!" answers the pilot. The propeller is again cautiously revolved, the motor starts and in a few minutes the plane is soaring skyward. The last of the flight of five having taken off and joined the others who are wheeling above the field, they join in a wedge-shaped formation, after the fashion of wild geese, and are off for their voyage over the lines. The sky becomes lighter every minute and the pilots locate themselves by the contour of the country, which lies beneath them like a colored map in bas-relief. Here and there are patches of woods, as green and delicate as ever; the Marne sparkles in the morning light as radiantly as in the days of the Roman Caesars. Further on huge areas are as pock-marked with craters as the face of the moon and as barren and

devoid of life, the scars of the grim conflict which has been fought and refought over them during four sullen years.

Now the pilots are over the lines, witnessing a Titanic struggle staged in miniature below them. Far down high explosives are silently bursting, gigantic shells tearing into the ulcerated area, but the noise of the motors deadens all other sounds; they hear little or nothing of the firing. They see the columns of black smoke arise as the shells explode. White puffballs of shrapnel begin to burst near them, but since the gunners have not yet found their range, they pay little attention. They are this day doing the "ceiling work," protecting the observation and range-finding planes far beneath them.

Cardot has been through these experiences before and is beginning to regard the life of a fighting aviator as a little humdrum after all. When the shrapnel begins to burst uncomfortably close, the formation opens out and shifts its position in order to get out of range.

Suddenly the barking of the high explosives ceases and the aviators are on the qui vive. There is a certain sense of security as long as the shrapnel is active; it is like the worrisome bird of the rhinoceros that indicates the presence of danger. The enemy will not risk jeopardizing their own machines when the firing is close. But Cardot has not as yet sighted them. Cold chills run upward the length of his spine, electrifying his hair; his heart is an almost audible thumb against his ribs. He chides himself for his fear and doggedly dresses on the plane just ahead of him.

Then, from out of nowhere, appear five German Fokkers manned by a pilot and gunner each; they are headed in the direction of the Americans

and are undoubtedly determined to open combat. Their metallic wings flash ominously in the sunlight.

Cardot's first spasm of fear is succeeded by thrills of excitement. He catches a glimpse of Gray, who waves exultantly and points to the slowly approaching enemy. The impending struggle smacks of the hand-to-hand contest of champions from each array, as when Goliath called to the Israelites: "Choose you a man for you and let him come down to me," and, manned as the German ships are, there is much of the inequality of that memorable fight.

The adversaries have grown in size and Cardot has grimly selected his plane. There is no time for excitement now, his man is in range. He pulls the trigger of his Vickers and sends a spray of bullets at the pilot, whom he thinks he sees crouching behind the windshield. Surely some of them will account for him, for Cardot can see his tracer bullets falling in a stream into the cockpit, but when he looks again the machine is banking, turning broadside to him in order to give the gunner a better range.

The formation has broken up and he becomes for a moment aware that he is in the center of a mêlée, a "dog-fight" in which the opponents are paired, each wheeling, firing, savagely seeking to gain an advantage over the other.

Again he sends a glittering stream in the direction of the enemy pilot. Disregarding the bullets that are coming his way, tearing through the wing fabrics and miraculously missing him, he is only keenly disappointed that his opponent is proving invulnerable.

"He's a damn wooden Hindenburg!" he exclaims, mentally picturing the nail-bespattered

totems of Berlin. *Nach ein mal,* and viciously he lets fire once more as another fair target presents itself, oblivious of the fact that the gunner's piece is pointed square at him. There is a sensation of scorching hot water slapping him in the face, and a second later another. A scorpion crawls up his right leg and stings it to insensibility.

And now his opponent leaves him suddenly and he realizes that when the formation scattered, he and his adversary became detached from the other fighters. Far off he can descry them still, milling for position, wheeling, snarling, biting.

"I guess I'm done for . . . Back to the lines for me, if I can reach them in time." He found that it was difficult for him to turn and head for the field. "They must have torn my head up, but here I am . . . Business as usual, like the Headless Horseman. I give it up . . ." A feeling of languor was stealing over him, his right leg was numb. His alter ego said: "This is what you were wishing for, wasn't it?" and he answered: "It suits me."

His machine was running stiffly and pounding badly, but he still figured he could make his destination. Presently he saw to the left of him another detached Spad over which two of the Fokkers were wheeling and swooping like hawks above their prey. Yes, it was Gray; he saw his number on the fuselage. The boy was having a hard time, diving, turning, evading his pursuers with every aerial trick at his command. Retreat seemed cut off. One of the enemy planes Cardot saw was the one he had just fought.

A wave of ardent affection and protective fervor swept over him. Little Gray, clean and spotless as the morning light—suppose they should

get him! He cursed himself for a poltroon for thinking of leaving with Gray fighting for his life, yet in his crippled condition his plane was almost a ship without a rudder. God, the boy was signalling for help by a familiar wing tilt they had agreed on!

By a Herculean effort he found himself straightened out and headed toward the scene of this unequal contest. He knew it would be difficult to manoeuver but he was oblivious of consequences. His idea now was to rush bull-like into one of the enemy ships, collide and fall together. It was his great opportunity and surely fate would not deny him this.

His steed seemed to be imbued with his own spirit and it gathered headway. The hot drops began to sting with almost unbearable intensity, blinding him for the moment, but he held his course. He was forced to disengage a hand to wipe his eyes and when he looked again the Fokkers were headed toward their lines, while Gray's plane was describing wide circles and descending.

"He has eluded them!" said Cardot, vastly relieved and momentarily expecting the boy to right his plane and join him. He throttled down to watch. But instead of righting itself, the machine continued to descend in circles of rapidly decreasing radius until it was in a nose dive and Cardot knew with dismay that its pilot had been killed. He watched transfixed until he saw a pale little burst of flame, like the striking of a match, which he knew to be the funeral pyre of his friend.

"Poor little Gray," he mused sorrowfully. "Of course, it couldn't have been I instead."

XXII

As Cardot made his way back in a dazed condition, his engine came to a sudden stop and he had to make a forced landing. This he made in an old wheat-field, coming to earth with a bad bump, but he was glad to be on solid ground again. Painfully he clambered out of the car and tearing off his head-gear and gloves he felt his face for evidence of wounds. It was stinging, but his hands came away bloodless.

"That's funny," he thought, and limped in front of the machine, which straddled the growing grain like a gigantic insect ready to take to flight. Two or three bullet holes in the radiator accounted for the hot drops which he had imagined blood, and also for the sudden stopping of the engine, through overheating.

"Well, anyway, my leg is shot to pieces," he said, accounting for his weakness. Slowly disengaging himself from his flying equipment, he found his uniform, in the region of the upper right leg, a welter of blood. Below that the bullet had ripped the cloth asunder, plowing the surface and badly lacerating the entire member. There was also a large blood-stain just above his right hip.

He was faint from the loss of blood and half-dazed. His sense of direction was gone; still he was able to feel a keen pang of disappointment that he had not by some heroic coup rescued his comrade from his pursuers and taken the count himself. Seeing that no stretcher-bearers were sent for him, he decided that he must undertake

to make his way to the nearest dressing station as best he could while consciousness remained.

For some distance he limped helplessly and with excruciating pain over the uneven field. Then, tracing the highway by the blasted and splintered skeletons of trees, which once gave pleasant shade to peaceful wayfarers, he oriented himself. He knew this road, and stumbled toward it. Once he fell and lay for a while in a pleasant state of coma; in his fancy he could hear the early morning song of the lark.

He would have lain longer had he not been goaded by a growing conviction that he could be patched up and ready in a few days to avenge the death of Gray.

He picked himself up, finding that the few minutes' respite had increased the difficulty of walking, and laboriously dragged himself onward to the edge of the road. The face of the early afternoon sun was reddened by the dust and smoke of battle. First it was blood to his sickened imagination. Then, as he saw the congestion of vehicles and men on the road, the whole confusion reminded him of the dusty circus grounds of his boyhood days, of the unloading and hauling of vans preparatory to the big show. It had been an eventful day; the Americans had advanced after sharp fighting and were still advancing along a six-mile front.

He virtually fell down the slope to the road ten feet below. A steel-helmeted soldier with fixed bayonet and full pack regarded him with mild surprise.

"Where is the nearest dressing station?" asked the aviator abruptly, his features contorted with pain.

"There's a first-aid station up this way, sir,"

said the soldier, pointing to the front, "and a field station half a mile down."

"Oh, yes. I know now," said Cardot dully.

"Hadn't you better wait for an ambulance?" the other asked solicitously.

"Perhaps I had," he agreed. "I guess I'm shot up worse than I first thought."

An ambulance came by him, but so filled with desperately wounded that he saw there was no room for him; then another in the same condition, and he began to realize that these conveyances were being taxed to their capacity.

Gradually he found himself taking an interest in the number of wounded men making their way to the rear on the other side of the road; they were men, wounded in varying degrees, who like himself were still able to walk. He did not become aware that it was a procession until three or four had passed; then others. The stream was unending.

The way of the walking wounded! Some were cursing as they limped along; some bore the stolid bovine look of injured animals; one lad, with a dressing on his head and a bandaged right arm held in a scanty sling, walked blithely along, whistling. He smiled as Cardot smiled at him and saluted with his left hand.

"I'm going to get a little rest at last," he called cheerily to the lieutenant.

A pair approached slowly, one pale and anaemic, whose face contorted with pain as though each step were a fiery ordeal. He was supported by the arm of the other about his waist. Though this man also wore a gauze bandage about his forehead, through which showed an ugly clot of blood, he still maintained a calm, beatific ex-

terior and a saint-like dignity. Cardot heard him talking as they passed.

". . . The body is material and is a mental concept only, being governed and controlled by mortal mind," he was saying. "Mortal man, though he may not be God himself, is a ray of His light. All this misery, sin, sickness, war and death, are simply shadows, dark images brought on by mortal thought, which flee before the light of Truth . . . This is the life eternal . . ."

A preacher! A Christian science practitioner!

"I wish I could believe all that," thought Cardot. "I wish I had his optimism. No, the good fellow is deluding himself. It is life all right, but not the life eternal." And then he recalled a passage from DeQuincey, melancholy companion of his lonely college days:

" 'Darkness and formless vacancy for a beginning, or something beyond all beginning; then next a dim lotus of human consciousness, finding itself afloat upon the bosom of waters without a shore; then a few sunny smiles and many tears; a little love and infinite strife; whisperings from paradise and fierce mockeries from the anarchy of chaos; dust and ashes and once more darkness circling around . . . . That is human life, that the inevitable amount of man's laughter and his tears—of what he does—of his motions this way and that way—' "

He could remember no more; the dust was choking him, his mind was confusion and chaos itself and he railed at himself for making the effort of thinking. Then, as in a dream, he heard his name called. He opened his eyes, recognized Callahan of his "flight" and he knew no more.

XXIII

There is, in the past of most of us, a haven of refuge on this earth, not a promised land beyond to which the preachers so glowingly refer but an accessible retreat in this life wherein, in a few days, we can review years of happy childhood and spend a little eternity of blissful recollection far removed from the pitiless grind of daily life.

Somewhere there is a kitchen, a hearth, perchance a big-bellied stove, which once winked jovially through its isinglass partitions as you sat with the grown-ups, propping your eyes open in order to postpone as long as you could your nightly banishment to the downy realms of bed. There is horsehair furniture; picture books in colors full of ferocious Indians, heroic explorers and General Putnam galloping down a stairway, over which your uncles mulled before you; there is the old clock which ticked thunderously through the silent vigil of the night when you woke up suddenly, thinking there was someone coming up the stairs after you. You listened to it intently for a while with senses alert until it changed its tune momentarily with something of a sigh, and then you snuggled down again into your feathery kingdom, only to be wakened by the sunshine, the soughing of the wind in the old catalpa tree and the bustle of breakfast preparations below.

And everywhere and always there is the dear, kindly, unruffled countenance of her whose heart seemed to defy time with the obstinacy of the old tree outside. You can see her today—the old-

fashioned grandmother of twenty years ago—joining in the noisy play of her grandchildren with the same spirit as though she were a child herself, turning to them always the same sweet, angelic smile, no matter how busy she might be or what cause for anxiety she might have, as though reproof, no matter how gentle, held something of a sacrilege. Her hands were always busy as her heart was full of love, sewing, knitting, cooking for her children and the children of her children.

To such a place where hallowed memories played as lambently as the golden flame of the early fall sunshine, the home of his maternal grandmother in Indiana—Cardot returned from the blasphemy and desolation of war. His mother was visiting a brother on the old place and he joined her there. His leg, after long hospital treatment, was improving and though he walked with a cane he was gradually regaining the use of it.

The transition from the bloodthirstiness of battlefields to the kindly, solicitous faces of family and friends back home was as vivid as the awakening from a horrible dream, and in the sudden revulsion of mind he wondered and pondered. Here everything was prosperous. The granaries everywhere were full and still the ripe grain was being cut, even though the workers were few. The War had taken its quota from the town and its sons were either "Somewhere in France" or in camps on this side. So far there had been no casualties. Cardot was the first wounded soldier these people had seen and as he passed in his slow walk along the main street, mothers from the outlying farms would stop him and with tears

of pride tell him of their sons, and perhaps exhibit a photograph, while the crowd around the drug store stove, gathering around it from force of habit, for the days were not yet cold, listened with awed respect to his first-hand information. His was the audience that had listened to the tale of the soldier from strange lands for time immemorial; he was the universal soldier described in Shakespeare's seven ages of man.

He wondered and pondered—while friends, anxious to honor a returning hero, took him for long rides through fields gleaming in the face of the setting sun and past patches of gay Harlequin-clad woodland—whether that fraternal era had arrived when rancor, class hatred and thirst for vengeance would disappear from the minds of men. No, it was too much to hope for. The dormant appetite for blood had been awakened and could be whetted by those who sought to serve their own ends. The power of the insidious and hyra-headed monster, propaganda, had been discovered and fair play, so characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon, had little chance against its lying tongues. So far it had been directed largely against the Germanic empires, among the Allies, and vice versa among the Germans, but, like firearms, it was a weapon which the War had made familiar and anon would be dangerous in the hands of its possessor.

Then Armistice Day came, with its spontaneous rejoicing all over the world, and the War was over. Cardot's leg continuing to improve, he returned to New York City. Here, inactivity hung on him like a pall. He had lost the knack for working. Everything in life appeared to his eyes to be so blasé, so played out. On every hand

there was disillusionment. None of the miracles of miracles had come to pass—the dead had not awakened, nor had the new Messiah put in appearance. There was still marriage and giving in marriage; divorce and the securing of divorce; there were births, deaths, profiteering and bankruptcy. The warrior ants that had moved so fiercely and blindly against each other, were groping in a dazed way for material with which to rebuild their ruined homes. In spite of the manifold predictions to the contrary the fabric of humanity seemed to have undergone no violent changes.

Someone had stuck a pin in the patriotism of the flag-waving and four-minute speaking days, and it had collapsed in a much shorter time than it had taken to inflate it. "The War is over!" had been the exultant cry of Armistice Day. "The War is over; now let us honor our home-coming heroes!" "The War is over!" was repeated with the effervescent enthusiasm of sentimentalists until it became stale and flat. "The War is over," they said, turning to their desks, "and we should worry!"

The first troops to return had received a glorious ovation. Cardot did not attempt to find a place on Fifth Avenue when the New York troops paraded. The crowds started to gather the afternoon before and many spent the entire night on the street in order to hold their places, while the itinerant hot-dog and sandwich man ministered to their wants. Every window, every roof, was crowded, and finally, as the long line of olive drabs swung proudly down the street, the spectators had cheered themselves hoarse, showering their heroes with improvised white paper confetti, candy and even money.

Then other divisions came, and still others, and space on the sidewalk was no longer at a premium. A few ardent patriots were always on hand, cheering vociferously in a considerate attempt to make up with volume of sound for lack of spectators, but the effect was only ludicrous. People had other things to do than to watch a long, monotonous parade. Such spectacles failed to interest them any longer; there was not enough variety of color. Moreover, with the bulk of the home boys back, why should they concern themselves with those of other states, or sections? A welcoming tug carrying a delegation to meet some of the returning soldiers of Pennsylvania, hailed a transport: "Are those the Pennsylvania troops?" "Naw," came a voice, "we're from New Joisey!" and the tug turned back without a toot.

The country had had its fill of soldiers; the glamour and romance of it all were gone. War-scarred heroes were peddling pencils on the streets. Fly-by-night concerns were exploiting the uniform and outfitting its wearers with catch-penny devices that made beggars of them. Thousands upon thousands of men were demobilized in New York City, where they spent the money given to take them home and were then thrown upon the charity of the community. Many a soldier, decorated for bravery on the fields of France, had pawned his *Croix de Guerre* for a pittance with which to buy him some food.

Everywhere there was lack of vision and foresight, divided responsibility and wasted effort on the part of those charged with the repatriation and rehabilitation of veterans. Months passed and the country was filled, in increasing numbers, with penniless, afflicted, disabled, disheartened soldiers,

who had returned to their country to find their jobs pre-empted, and themselves unable to find work of any kind; or, if unfitted for work, objects of public and private charity. Hospital facilities for the wounded were disgracefully inadequate and untold numbers died for lack of prompt or efficient attention, virtually abandoned by the country they served.

Out of this welter the American Legion, the service man's organization of America, imbued with the loftiest ideals for which the United States has always been sponsor, and adding to them a chaste militarism, was coming into prominence, making its voice heard. Now it was begging, pleading, memoralizing for a square deal for the wounded buddies. It sought in vain for a means of untangling the plethoric skein of red tape which surrounded the government agencies dealing with the problem. The disabled were on the defensive against the government, just as those that were still fit were on the defensive in securing and holding jobs in civil life, pitted in remorseless competition against men who had not been in the service.

Cardot, at first, was prone to minimize these difficulties, feeling that the government bureaus charged with the rehabilitation of veterans were only slow in getting under way, but as the "cases" multiplied at Washington and men died on the way and even in the ante-rooms of the bureaus while seeking, beseeching assistance, he stroked his chin and admitted that something after all was wrong.

There began to grow on him a desire to be of help to these men, to consecrate himself to lessening the burdens of the blind, the halt and the gassed. He felt it as an opportunity, a chance

handed him from Heaven to make himself whole again, and he thanked the Lord for it. His resources were slender, but he could augment them in some way. Money matters had always seemed to solve themselves in some mysterious manner; he would borrow, skimp, and work at nights or odd times.

His start was made on the East Side. He secured the names and addresses of some dozen or more men who were not being taken care of in the government hospitals and then transferred his baggage from his respectable little down-town hotel to a dingy room on Lexington Avenue, where he might save on rent and overhead.

His first visit was paid to the home of Oscar Hartmann on Fiftieth Street below Second Avenue. It was a dreary-faced tenement building, and three flights up, but finally he was rapping at the door while squalid, pasty-faced children stopped their solemn play in the hall to watch him. The door was opened by a hard-visaged, eagle-eyed woman, whose looks demanded the purpose of his visit. Cardot was temporarily taken aback. He was at a loss as to how to proceed; in fact, he had hardly contemplated working amidst such drab surroundings.

"Does Oscar Hartmann live here?" he asked.

"Ya, he live here. You vant to see him?" the woman answered.

"If you please."

She conducted him into a disordered room, with a dirty rag rug on the floor, furnished with a few broken pieces of furniture. From an adjoining room came a sickening smell of boiling clothes. In one corner beside a bleary window sat Oscar Hartmann, black-haired, yellow-visaged, scowling. He seemed a classic reproduction of the

spirit of Lenine and Trotzky. His right leg was missing.

"My name is Cardot," said the philanthropist, advancing. Even as he spoke he was aware of a sort of unconscious superiority which he had promised himself to try to avoid.

"Well, mine is Hartmann," said the other shortly.

"I came to see if I couldn't do something for you in some way."

"You're not a government man, are you?" challenged the other.

"No."

"I was goin' to say if you was, you could politely step to hell—you and your government, too."

He sniffed angrily and sat back in his chair, drawing a tattered shawl more closely about him. Cardot gained a first inkling of what his work really meant; it could not be simply the gratuitous distribution of alms. He saw that he would have to use a great deal of tact and delicacy in making friends with this man and in reconciling him to life, if indeed he were ever to obtain any measure of success.

"No," he began, explaining rather awkwardly, "I'm not representing any organization. I'm just a buddy like you and I'm out on my own hook, seeing what I can do for you fellows."

Hartmann was silent. Cardot drew up a rickety chair near him.

"You seem to have had a run of hard luck, all right," he continued. "Now if there is any way that I can help, anything I can do . . ."

"There ain't nothin' you can do," said Hartmann finally. "The guys in Washington could uv, but it's too late, damn 'em. I lost my leg

and got t. b. over there and what do I get for it—a little pittance of money that I had to beg and scrape for, and then they cut that in two, and now they've cut me out entirely. Yet I'm rated as 'totally and permanently disabled.' That's a hell of a joke, ain't it? Put you on the list and then don't give you a red. Me for the Kaiser's army next time, you bet!"

"Well, have you written?" asked Cardot, trying to find some way in which he could start a more optimistic trend of thought in the man.

"Written! Christ, yes. All I'm going to," said Hartmann bitterly. "There was a fellow on the floor below wrote, too, but here I am yet. I'm damned if I think I'd take their money now. I ain't good for many more days."

"Oh, it isn't as bad as all that," said Cardot hopefully. "We'll get the matter of your pay straightened out somehow and things will look more cheerful."

Here the invalid was racked with coughing and Cardot had to sit uncomfortably in the closed room until he was through. There had always been something leprous about consumption that revolted him, yet this was what he must expect to come across very frequently in his mission. Here was the seamy side not only of heroism, but of the big, gilded city. Like a whited sepulchre it was filled with the uncleanness of the white plague.

Being assured that there was nothing further he could do on that day, he left, resolving to inform one of the posts of the American Legion, the Red Cross, or some other organization that might be able to give active and prompt aid. He informed both of them that afternoon and then set out to find work for himself. This he found

as stenographer with a firm of importers to which he had entrée and recommendation, and he so arranged matters that he could commence his duties there late in the afternoon and work well into the evening, thus giving him the first part of the day for the work to which he had begun to devote himself. True, his salary was not large, but he figured that it would be enough to maintain him, if he lived sparingly, and his position would keep him in touch with some men of means whom he hoped to interest in his charity from time to time. It hurt him to think that charity should be necessary.

The following day he called at the Public Health Service hospital, containing over two hundred and fifty patients, with adequate accommodations for about one hundred and fifty. He talked with a number of the boys; sent out and obtained cigarettes for some of them, learned the desires for particular magazines of others, and left with the satisfaction that he was making progress. In the afternoon he reported for work and applied himself intensely to it until eight o'clock. When he left he was radiating with happiness. It had been a day full of blessedness. He had been shown the way back to self-respect.

XXIV

Returning to visit Hartmann a week later, Cardot knocked repeatedly but there was no answer. Finally as he turned to go a man came up a few steps from the lower floor.

"There ain't anybody there," he said.

"I just came to inquire about Hartmann. Do you know how he's getting along?"

"He died," answered the other shortly. "Died three days ago."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Cardot inadequately. "I'm awfully sorry to hear it."

"Yes, he died damning and God-damning the United States. I had been writing the Bureau of War Risk Insurance for him, trying to get some of his pay. He was taken with a bad spell last week and when we saw he was going to pass out I wired them to send some money so as to pay funeral expenses, but so far I haven't heard from them. We took up a contribution to help bury him and so that's the end of the poor guy. He was a good soldier, I've been told, even though his people were German. The old woman has moved out."

He turned to go back to his room and Jules went slowly down into the street, feeling his smallness, his incapacity, very keenly. Having chanced on this case, the first in his new career, he mentally multiplied it by thousands. His efforts were so dwarfed that he felt as if it were too colossal a task to continue. There was a temptation to go on with the throngs in the street, who seemed to be concerned with their own interests,

and let the matter rest with the government; after all, it was the government's responsibility.

But the next day his apathy and disappointment had passed. Disappointed though he had been and feeling almost guilty of neglect himself, inasmuch as he was a citizen of the government charged with the care of these disabled men, he rose early, resolved to redouble his efforts so as to make them count more, to put in more hours. Formerly charity had appealed to him as a sort of semi-profession practiced by people who had more time and means on their hands than they knew what to do with, as much for the purpose of exalting their ego or salving a bad conscience, as for any other, but now he regarded it as detached from himself or any comfort he might draw from being engaged in it. It was a paramount duty and a work to which he was called.

He began to enlist the help of others, not pleading but using his own personality to obtain results. He secured outings for the boys from other men in the Legion, from his employers, from anyone he might interest. One evening he chanced to go into a motion picture show on lower Sixth Avenue. A stout woman sitting beside him began to talk in a friendly way about the film before them—a scene from Ireland. It turned out that she was a cook for a large menage on Park Avenue that maintained a retinue of servants.

"It's thim British devils that's causin' all the woe of this world. It was Queen Victoria herself that caused the ships to be sunk that was carryin' supplies to the starvin' Irish."

Cardot listened patiently while she garrulously rehearsed an accumulation of misinformation and vented her spleen on the misunderstood English.

But while she was talking he was concocting a plan. Her Majesty, the cook, could assist him.

When the picture was over he accompanied her to the establishment and was invited to the servants' quarters, where he was formally introduced to a gathering that was holding forth merrily on cake, wine and other refreshments that had been sent down for their entertainment from a party in progress above them. He made himself at home, played rummy and chatted with them, almost disabusing his mind of old, ingrown prejudices against the menial classes. Jane McCullough, a pretty, blue-eyed Scotch maid, attracted him; there was a hint of the Gaelic tongue in her speech; there was the wistfulness of the heath in her eyes. They exchanged confidences and he asked when he left if he might call again.

The net result of this subterranean connection with the aristocratic and awe-inspiring establishment on Park Avenue was a generous supply of smuggled dainties, mostly pastries and cakes, which he and Jane distributed at the hospital on one of her afternoons off. The beaming faces and expressions of gratitude bestowed on them more than repaid for their trouble. And Cardot felt that he had discovered a supply depot on which he could call again.

So through the sultry summer Jules continued the strenuous program he had started. The list of neglected veterans was lengthening but he endeavored to do only his nearest duty. He found that he did not accomplish much by endeavoring to interest other organizations or people, that much valuable time was lost thereby and it was hard to check up on results, so he contented himself with doing what he could with the individual cases he took up. In most instances he followed

the suggestions elicited from those he desired to assist. He was scrivener, fiscal agent, wheel-chair attendant, reader, entertainer.

He was overdoing, taxing his vitality to its extreme limits, and it began to tell. It was becoming increasingly difficult to rise early in the morning and his feet became more sluggish as they turned toward the office with its day's work crowded into the afternoon and evening hours, but he hung on tenaciously. There were more and more demands on the little money he was earning. He had eliminated smoking and all luxuries and was selecting in his meals only eatables richest in food value. Calories and proteins—words which had hitherto meant very little to him—became synonymous with economy.

XXV

It was the month of May again. The winter, although it had not been severe, had been full of suffering for the derelicts of the War. With the coming of spring Cardot had hoped that his vitality would return, but instead it continued to ebb like the current of an electric battery that has been short-circuited, delivering only a portion of its energy to the parts for which it is intended. Many a night he thought he could go no further, that the end had come and he must halt, only to rise the following morning and goad himself to the work before him, which seemed to be increasing in geometrical progression.

Yet he continually remembered how abundantly he was being repaid, how kindly fate had treated him, and that he had been brought from a slough of misery to this state of mental serenity. In his work he felt that he was gradually making himself whole again; he allowed his fancies free play as to Consuela. It buoyed him up considerably to think of her as still waiting for him. He would not permit the negative idea to linger in his mind. The War was over, the spring had brought its flowers; why should it not also bring Consuela? He wondered where she was, whether she, too, had returned from France. Was she the bride of the domineering medical officer by this time? His hopes fell temporarily and then rose again as he remembered that no news was good news; such a disaster, he felt, would have been flashed to him telepathically.

One Sunday afternoon a friend volunteered

to take him and three of his badly wounded charges for a motor ride. They passed along Riverside Drive, admiring the long array of one of the fleets that had just returned from overseas duty. Like dogs, the great ships seemed to lie panting in a kindlier mood, with an air of satisfaction over a service well performed. The pleasant weather had brought out numbers of sightseers.

Presently they were approaching the apartment in which Mrs. Claiborne lived. He had passed it before, not without a certain feeling of dread and self-reproach for his lack of chivalry. He owed her a visit, perhaps a tender word. He could trust himself now; he was not seeing life so completely with his senses. The War-madness over, clarity of vision and comprehension had returned, and though he reflected with sorrow that he had done both himself and her irreparable injury, still the heaven and the stars above the material world were no longer completely obliterated. Her friendship had not been shallowly rooted, had not been lightly bestowed, and he saw again with clearer light the enormous sacrifice which his companionship had entailed. Yes, he admitted, he would always remember and cherish the memory of her friendship. The oft-quoted but beautiful lines occurred to him: "You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, but the scent of the roses will linger there still."

And then his pulse quickened. She was sitting on the grassy parkway while a few feet away sat a man, gazing complacently up the river, whom he knew to be her husband. Between them a child was crawling—his child! She looked up startled, as though quick instinct warned of his presence, and flashed her recognition while the

machine was still some hundred feet off. Then she flushed hotly and her eyes sought the ground. She raised her head again and, as he passed quite close to her, her smile of sweetly-sad humility told him all. He smiled in return and lifted his hat. It was then he noted that a sleeve of her husband's coat was armless.

. . . . . .

The spring wore into summer and to the problem of the disabled was added that of the ex-service men, men who had returned to find their jobs pre-empted by those who had stayed behind. Some, when they applied for their old positions, found themselves faced patronizingly by the former office boy, across the desk which they had occupied when they enlisted. Others found svelte young women, with a smug stand-in with the boss, doing their work, while still others who had been given work were discharged when it slackened up a bit, under operation of the principle of "last hired, first fired."

Their savings and resources, if indeed they had any before the war, disappeared and they were early without funds when the inevitable period of industrial depression, following the return to a peacetime basis, set in. They inhabited the park benches, many spending their nights there. They formed bread-lines of increasing lengths. A show of hands and careful questioning by Legion workers of the longest queues of men in various parts of the city, waiting either for work or food, showed that the great majority of them were ex-service men. They were tempted into evil, some of them, though even the most lawless had learned in the ranks, or on board ship, what order and decency and discipline

meant; and then a pernicious slander went forth that the returned soldiers were largely responsible for the wave of crime. The works of hardened and experienced criminals were being attributed wholly to them, to men who with the greatest spontaneity in history had offered themselves for service in a strange land to ward off danger still remote to their country!

The organizations of ex-service men were allowed to bury their dead without hindrance and without help from the outside, except perhaps the immediate family. As the caskets containing the remains of those who had died on the other side were shipped to the United States to be laid in their final resting places, their comrades conducted the last rites, and in most cases constituted novelty of the first arrivals, assumed the attitude of "Oh-it's-just-another-military-funeral," and paid scant attention.

It all amazed Cardot, this apathetic reaction of the emotional American, and he was forced to the conclusion that though this was not a "thin red line of 'eroes," but the flower of a nation demobilized, the soldier was still the soldier of whom Kipling wrote:

> "It's Tommy this, and Tommy that, an' 'Chuck him out, the brute!'
> But it's 'Saviour of 'is country,' when the Guns begin to shoot."

So Cardot had plenty of work in the field he had chosen. Occasionally the savour of the flesh-pots reached his nostrils; especially when he realized what an infinitesimal amount of good his labor had accomplished, his strained nerves cried

out for rest and decent food and less depressing surroundings, but he held on doggedly, cursing his weakness and the insomnia which now haunted his bedroom, as something which if spoken to with sufficient asperity might leave him.

XXVI

Consuela vowed, with all the earnestness of the men who swore they would murder the bugler, that if ever she were returned alive to her native heath she would roam no more. Her adventurous spirit had been sated for the nonce and she felt that she had seen far too much for her own good of the terror and pain of war. She had worked hard and the Armistice did not come any too soon for her.

She returned to Florida and for a while, a long while at that, it did not seem as though she would ever become weary of the old house and the familiar scenes, of the white strand of the seashore, of the wholesomeness of the pines, of the hibiscus and oleanders and guavas in the yard, or the holystoned appearance of the white pine floor of the kitchen, with its shining pans and grumbling Pinkie, the negro woman with the misery in the chest, who could be so easily tempted to laughter.

Winter, glorious and flashing, came with its gifts of golden fruit and its Chautauqua of lighthearted birds, and she was content to sit in the sunshine of the front porch, with her books or in company with her father, and watch this sylvan pageant of peace; or to review it on the back of her grey nag, Zephyr, who was as comfortable a companion as anyone could wish and as gentle and mild as her name. All of the old places, however, seemed to speak softly of Cardot and to reprove her for duplicity to herself. On the beach she found the exact spot where he had inscribed her name in the sand. She even im-

agined she saw a trace of it yet, but it proved to be a black, water-soaked twig beneath.

When she called on the hermits, Uncle Eben looked up from his sloop-building with a genuine and whole-hearted welcome in his eyes and voice.

"Well, well, lass, we're glad to have you back with us. We've missed you sore, like the apple-blossoms of the old State."

"I'm glad to be back, I can assure you. And how have you and Uncle John been looking after yourselves? You are looking the same as ever. You have ceased to grow older, haven't you?"

"Yes, we run along in the same old groove and one day is like another, we don't notice the flight of time. But you have seen some sights, I'll warrant."

She had cast her eyes about the shack. In the next room she could see the bunk that her shipwrecked lover had occupied.

"Sit down, Miss," Uncle Eben drew up a box, "and talk to me while I rig this man-o'-war. You know a visit like this is an event in an old man's life; there ain't many people pay much attention to the likes of us."

He returned to his side of the table and Consuela took the proffered seat.

"And our boy, you haven't seen him lately, have you?" asked the old man, again bending over his work.

"Yes, I met him on the streets of Paris. He was an aviator, you know."

"And you met him in Paris, eh, and that just by chance? Well, well." With bent head he went on quietly whittling a piece of soft white pine, which presently he began to fit in the orlop of his ship. Consuela watched him interestedly.

"But you haven't heard from him since, I mean? Since he came back?"

"No, I haven't," blankly, "I really don't know where he is."

"I have," said the old man proudly, still addressing himself to his work. "He didn't forgit his old friends. Did ye know he was wounded?"

Consuela drew her breath sharply.

"No!" she exclaimed. "Was it serious? Is he recovering?"

"He was hurt right badly, as well as I can make out, but he didn't say much about it in his last letter, only that he was getting along pretty well."

Consuela decided that the old man held valuable information, but she did not want to appear too eager. She spoke soothingly to her heart as she would to a galloping horse; she had cancelled her first arrangement and made her second bargain, and the latter was the one she would stick to. So Cardot must be relegated to the limbo of the fleeting attachments she had made at one time or another.

But she could not entirely repress her interest.

"And where is he now, Uncle Eben?" she asked.

"New York City," answered the old man. "Wouldn't you like to read his last letter? It seems he is doing some work among the wounded boys up there. Let me get it for you."

"Oh, don't go to the trouble, Uncle Eben," protested Consuela, coloring.

"It's no trouble at all," he replied rising. From a shelf where he had carefully put it away Uncle Eben brought the envelope and handed it to her. It bore on the outside the postmark of the Grand Central Station, New York. She started at the familiar hand.

On extracting the letter she read suffering in

the writing, it was uneven and seemed to have a fine quiver to it that she had never noted before.

"Dear Uncle Eben," the letter ran, "I just received your letter and, as always, was glad to hear from you. I really don't see how you find so much to write about, living in the isolation that you do. But there is, after all, a happiness in solitary life that one doesn't find in the cities of men. You with your ships to keep you busy and the sea to throw you in a living, as well as furnish you food for reflection in its ever-changing moods, are like the prisoner that has become so attached to his prison cell that when he is released he tries to break into jail again.

"Well, you do your work and I do mine. Mine is in another sphere, one in which men die cursing, as they did on the other side, a world of lungless, legless and otherwise disabled men who ought to be spending their days in some comfort, inasmuch as they gave all for their country. But that's another story. The trouble is, I'm about all in myself. I need rest, mostly, but that condition will pass; I feel sure of it.

"I think I told you something of this before, but if it hadn't been for my weakness, my lack of appreciation of what a brave, decent woman means to a man, I would have had a real helpmeet, and someone to love. Yes, I mean it. You old codgers have forgotten what the word means, or at least say you have, but it is still a very present need with me, and I have to seek it out before I become too embittered with life. I have sinned and suffered, and I am still suffering, but my punishment seems light in view of what I did. I'll never trifle with my conscience again.

"So much for that! I make you my father

confessor, because I don't know of anyone else who would stand for it. Some of these days I'll be down your way, and look you up, perhaps. I would like to see that model of the clipper you are building. You must have done considerable studying to perfect your plans of it.

"My best wishes to you and Uncle John. As ever, Jules Cardot."

She noted the address and inserting the letter in the envelope, returned it without comment to Uncle Eben.

"A good lad, that," said the old man, casting an inquiring look at her as he returned from replacing the letter to the exact spot from which he had taken it, "sincere and tender-hearted."

"I know it," she replied noncommittally. "I am certainly sorry to hear he had been wounded, but he seems to have recovered. Please remember me when you write. We are the best of friends, you know."

"I thought you was," declared Uncle Eben, again seating himself at the table, and then with the frankness of age, "I was in hopes you would marry him."

"Why, Uncle Eben," she reproved, blushing, "you are getting to be a regular matchmaker! Since you appear to be in on the secret, we were engaged, but you see what he says: it is all his fault that it has been broken off; in fact, he did it himself. And now I am engaged to someone else."

"And do you love that 'someone'?"

"Well enough to marry him. Besides, there's more to him than there is to Jules; he's more dependable, steadier." She was advancing the arguments through which she had almost con-

vinced herself that she was taking the right course.

"I don't understand the young folks of today," said Uncle Eben slowly. "In my day we used to think of love enduring forever. But for my sake, little girl, don't make the mistake of marrying without love, thinking that it will come after marriage. Don't do it. With all the knowledge and science and new-fangled ideas of today, love is still at the bottom of happiness."

It was quite a speech for him and he began whittling assiduously, leaving Consuela stricken with surprise. The world, even in his seclusion, had not gone entirely over his head. There was something oracular in his words, coming as they did out of this place of retirement.

In February came Doctor Duane for hunting. Consuela met him at the station and brought him and his trappings triumphantly to the cottage. She thought she noticed a little shock of disappointment at the lack of splendor and pretense of the house in which his fiancée lived, but he apparently recovered quickly and spoke approvingly of the homelike appearance of the place. He was urbane and professional in his manner and hinted of a lucrative practice in the city. And where he hinted, his clothes and outfitting proclaimed aloud. He had the best rifle the market could afford and a shining rod and reel with a book of flies to fascinate the eye of every known species of fish. Yet when Mr. Childers took him into a cypress bayhead a few miles distant, the headwaters of a little river flowing into the Halifax, the black bass, or trout as they are known in Florida, displayed their conservative affection for a shiny "meat-skin" bait and wrought-iron

hook at the end of a bamboo pole, and it was Mr. Childers who caught the string.

He had brought his bag of golf sticks along and Consuela drove him into town on several occasions that he might go the rounds of the hotel course.

He was deferential and well-informed so that Dan Childers began to like him immensely, listening to his discourse on the affairs of the world outside with the respect of the true woodsman for salient facts and figures, but Consuela found him just a little difficult. She could not disabuse her mind of a fancy that he was continually laughing up his sleeve at her and her artless ways; that his preference must be for exotic women who could be tantalizingly experienced, while she must remain a modest woods-violet in his eyes. This thought gave her considerable worry—such a man would inevitably make a doll's house of his home, and Peggy would never make a second Norah.

Yet he was an irresistible lover and the date of the wedding was fixed for June. With the confidence of the young woman in her power to reform, tame or transform the nature of the man she expects to marry, an illusion which has followed her down the ages, Consuela promised herself a victory over him when she should go to New York in April to shop and choose her trousseau. Then she would burgeon out and show herself the sophisticated city woman of the times; she would discard what he evidently chose to regard as bucolic ingenuousness with her simple frocks, and assume complexity with smarter clothes. It had been done hundreds of times—in the movies.

XXVI

A sharp pebble grinding through the paper-thinness of the sole of Cardot's shoe threw him into serious contemplation of the future and what it contained for him. He was at the end of his rope, both as to finances and physical strength. As he looked back over the struggling of the past month, he marvelled at the tenacity of his will power and the nervous energy which alone had carried him forward. But this day he decided it would not be fair to overtax himself any further; he must grant himself an indefinite leave of absence and return home. As a further argument the old wounds had cast their ballot in favor of this move; the scars were protesting with sharp twinges of pain.

He must take Bennie Collins out in his wheelchair to see the beauty of spring in Central Park, and then he was through. Bennie, with a leg and three fingers of his right hand gone, gassed and sick, had looked forward to this outing for a week; together they had planned it with all the details of a campaign. He wanted to go on Sunday morning, he wanted to see the animals, he wanted to watch the people in their holiday clothes, and Jules could not find the heart to deny him.

The following morning, with the assistance of two of the men on Bennie's tenement floor, Bennie and his chair were carried down the three flights of stairs to the street and Cardot started on his tour.

"I'm about S. O. L. myself, Bennie," he con–

fessed when they were under way. "I'm going home next week. Back to old Florida for me!"

"Florida! They say that's some nifty dump. Wish I could go along," said the boy wistfully.

"Wish you could, too, Ben. What you want to do is to get well. Get some of this vocational training that's being passed around and come down and get a job."

"I'm going to do that thing. You send those fellows around to see me. Some of these days I'll have enough money to buy a tin leg with, and then it'll be 'look out, girls!'"

The hopefulness and patience of Bennie had been an affecting thing. He hugged his little option on life with the fervor with which a child clings to a rag doll.

They had traversed the park, "done" the Zoo, sat and rested awhile and watched the people, and Cardot was tired out and moody while Benny was contented and jubilant.

"We've had a great mornin', haven't we?" he kept repeating. "Great stuff, this fresh air. I ain't going to fergit you soon for this, old scout."

About eleven o'clock they started back across the park, eastward toward Fifth Avenue, Cardot pushing the chair briskly in order to end his mission. He was occupied with gloomy thoughts when suddenly two figures on horseback appeared from behind a hedge. The chair was directly across the bridle path and the riders were forced to rein up their horses suddenly in order to avoid an encounter. Cardot, with an exclamation, pulled the chair out of the way and at the same time recognized the couple. It was Consuela and Duane, both dressed in conventional riding habit.

The incident occupied only a few seconds.

Duane scowled, called savagely: "Why don't you use a little care in crossing here?" and flicked his horse with his whip. Across the road Consuela looked back, bewildered, as though not sure whom she had seen.

"Damn 'em," said Bennie angrily. "Them swells didn't miss us far."

Jules, too, was thoroughly angry, both at Duane and himself. Why, he asked himself hotly, had he not blocked the way and taken his sweet time in moving? His fist doubled involuntarily as he felt a wild desire to break it on the point of the other's jaw. He was angry at himself for the sorry figure he must have made in Consuela's eyes. Here was certainly an anticlimax to all the months of hard work he had put in, trying to alleviate the suffering of others.

He saw Bennie to his room and left him as soon as possible, his blood still boiling. Back in his own dingy lodging he flung himself on his sway-backed iron bed, with its thin mattress, and gazed at the ceiling where the dust hung in little rolls and a spider in one of the corners squatted motionless before the stale remains of a fly. The squalor of his surroundings served only to incense him the more.

The next day Jules severed his connections in the city, planning to leave for the South by the early afternoon train. After paying his rent, he found that he had just enough, with the exercise of frugality, to reach home. But he breathed a sigh of relief; the long vacation had begun.

He had just stepped down the iron-railed steps, suit-case in hand, when he heard his name called and Consuela, having rounded the corner, came running to him.

"I thought I never would find your address,"

she said, breathlessly. He regarded her with open-mouthed astonishment.

"But, Peggy," he exclaimed, sensing that she bore a message of importance to him, "how did you know it at all? who told you? I can hardly believe my eyes. You'll have to pinch me to make me sure I'm awake."

The flesh of his arm was promptly pressed between her thumb and forefinger.

"I'm reassured," he laughed, "but what errand brings you here? A few minutes more and I would have been on my way. I'm going home."

"Don't be too hasty, young man," she checked him archly. "I have other plans for you. I mean to keep an eye on you."

"I don't understand at all," he said perplexed, "how about the gallant horseman? Where is he?"

"He has galloped out of my life—a mutual disagreement with no regrets on either side. But we have plenty of time to discuss that. Aren't you glad? You don't seem so a bit."

"Am I?" he exclaimed with something of a gladsome whoop. "Peggy! 'True man and woman to each other's arms.' All the world couldn't keep us apart."

THE END.

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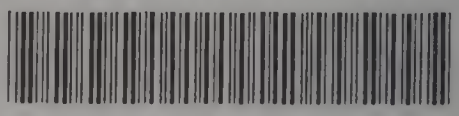

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